

'HE DIDN'T DIE ALONE'

Fargo man becomes pen pal with fallen soldier's relatives decades later, LIFE

The Forum

OF FARGO - MOORHEAD

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'I failed as a father' | Fargo man gets 14 years in prison for DUI crash that killed his son



Michael Vosburg / Forum Photo Editor

Christopher Lee Devine appears for sentencing Monday in Cass County District Court for fatally injuring his 7-year-old son and critically injuring another son, then 5, in a March 23 DUI crash in south Fargo.

By April Baumgarten
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FARGO

Imagine your first-born son brain-dead in a hospital bed as he takes his last breath, while your other son lies in the next room fighting for his life after the two boys were in a drunken driving crash, their father at the wheel.

Kristen Sande wanted those images to be visualized by those sitting Monday, Jan. 27, in a Cass County Courtroom. It's how she felt after Christopher Lee Devine, 33, decided to shoot whiskey with a friend, put his and Sande's children in the back seat of a vehicle and drive down South University Drive last year before crashing into another vehicle.

"Imagine your heart sink at the thought of losing both of your sons," Sande wrote in a letter read by prosecutor Ryan Younggren. "Imagine feeling your heart sink again, having to tell your baby's best friend his confidant, his idol, his hero, his heart, his love, his everything was no longer on Earth."

Devine sat silently — sometimes shaking his head and covering his face with his hands — as Cass County

DEVINE: Page A3

Moorhead aims to put half-cent sales tax for city projects to public vote

By Dave Olson
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MOORHEAD — The Moorhead City Council voted Monday night, Jan. 27, to seek legislative authority to put a half-cent sales tax question to a public vote, with proceeds from such a tax possibly funding a number of potential projects, including an aquatic center.

The move comes as the Minnesota Legislature is set to convene in early February and after a recent council workshop, during which members talked about community amenities and improvements.

A sales tax was discussed as a potential funding source for such amenities, but Legislative authority is required before a public vote can be held on the question of a sales tax,

and a referendum can only happen during a general election.

If the Legislature gives Moorhead permission to put a sales tax question before residents, the earliest a vote could happen is the general election of November 2022.

According to information shared during Monday's meeting of the council, potential projects benefiting from a sales tax include:

- ▶ A regional community and aquatic center.
- ▶ A regional library and city hall complex.
- ▶ Regional transportation improvements.
- ▶ A regional inclusive playground.
- ▶ Regional parks and trails.

Minnesota Gov. Tim

TAX: Page A3

'I live, breathe and sing missing and murdered'

Crisis of missing Indigenous people sparks activists, self-taught searchers to help families awaiting answers

Editor's note: This is the third installment of a three-part series on the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the upper Plains

By Natasha Rausch
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FARGO — Half a dozen Native and non-Native women alike sat around a table in the lobby of the Plains Art Museum for their monthly meeting on missing and murdered Indigenous people, or MMIP.

Their group was formed shortly after a local Native American woman, Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, was brutally murdered in August 2017. The members of the group, known as the Fargo Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Task Force, have a shared trauma, said Ruth Buffalo, a member of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation and a



Natasha Rausch / The Forum

Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase gave up her career as a welder to search for missing and murdered Indigenous people across the country.

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Today's weather

Cloudy, light snow
Details, D4



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Fargo Park District taps new director

Interim leader chosen from pool of 40 applicants

By C.S. Hagen
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FARGO — In what was repeatedly called a tough decision, the Fargo Park District Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to select Dave Leker as its new executive director on Monday, Jan. 27.

Leker, a former deputy director, has been the park district's interim leader since Joe Vettel resigned under controversy in July.



Leker

The executive director oversees 700 full-time employees with an annual budget of about \$27 million.

Leker is set to become the ninth Fargo Park District executive director since the district's inception in 1910.

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Burgum attends swanky party at Jeff Bezos' house

Minot, N.D.
Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos threw a party in Washington, D.C., this past weekend.

Among the invitees were Microsoft founder Bill Gates, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Jared Kushner and wife Ivanka Trump, Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) and North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum.



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by the Daily Mail, the event was a sort of after-party for the glitzy Alfalfa Club Dinner, which was also held this weekend. Romney was the keynote speaker at the dinner.

That dinner was also

the reason Burgum was on the scene.

"Gov. Burgum was in D.C. on personal business as a guest of his longtime friend Bill Gates at the Alfalfa Club dinner," Burgum spokesman Mike Nowatzki told me. "No tax dollars or state resources were used."

Nowatzki added that the event was an opportunity to build relationships and promote North Dakota with people at the highest levels of government and

business. "They did it all on their own dime," he said.

The location of the fete was the 27,000-square-foot, \$23 million Washington D.C. mansion Bezos bought in 2016.

Burgum isn't mentioned in the Daily Mail article, but a photo of him alongside Gates and North Dakota first lady Kathryn Helgaas Burgum is featured.

The Alfalfa Club was founded in 1913 by a

group of Southerners wanting to honor the birthday of Civil War general and Virginian Robert E. Lee. It now exists to hold, at the end of each January, the black-tie party Burgum attended.

The group began admitting blacks in 1974, and women in 1994. In 2009, then-President Barack Obama attended and addressed the event. "This dinner began almost 100 years ago as

a way to celebrate the birthday of Gen. Robert E. Lee," Obama told attendees. "If he were here with us tonight, the general would be 202 years old. And very confused."

To comment on this article, visit www.sayanythingblog.com

Rob Port, founder of SayAnythingBlog.com, a North Dakota political blog, is a Forum Communications commentator. Listen to his Plain Talk Podcast and follow him on Twitter at @RobPort.

Fargo eyes allowing home gun, ammunition sales

By Dave Olson
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FARGO — The Fargo City Commission voted 3-2 Monday night, Jan. 27, to start a process that could change city ordinance to allow for home sales of firearms and ammunition.

The commission vote directs the city Planning Department to work on a revision of existing ordinance language that would permit such sales.

Before the change could become official, the Fargo Planning Commission must hold a hearing and present changes to the city commission for final approval.

The review of the city's rules regarding firearm sales was proposed by Commissioner Tony Gehrig, who said he had been contacted by a number of citizens who wondered why the prohibition was in place.

Gehrig said if an ordi-

nance change is made it would essentially apply to mail-order gun sales, where a local customer buys a firearm and has it shipped to a licensed gun dealer in Fargo to be picked up.

He said Fargo's ban is problematic for local dealers who operate out of their homes and hold federal licenses to buy and sell guns. Dealers have told him they cannot get their license renewed if a local ordinance pro-

hibits home gun sales, he added.

No such prohibition exists in Moorhead, where Gehrig said he has been able to make a mail-order purchase of a firearm in the manner he is looking to make legal in Fargo.

He asked Fargo City Attorney Erik Johnson look into the city's rules regarding commercial activity in homes, and Johnson provided the commission with a letter outlining the history of

the city's Land Development Code, which covers such matters.

Johnson's letter states that in 2001 Fargo's home occupation law was revised, and firearm and ammunition sales were added to the list of prohibited occupations.

"I recommend that the commission refer the matter to the Planning Department as a proposed text amendment to the Land Development Code and to direct the

city attorney to work with the Planning Department regarding such process," Johnson said in his letter.

In the 3-2 vote referring the matter to the Planning Commission, the dissenting votes came from Commissioners John Strand and Dave Piepkorn, who indicated they were not comfortable with lifting the prohibition on home gun sales.

Readers may reach Forum reporter Dave Olson at 701-241-5555.

WOMEN

From Page A1

Democratic state representative for Fargo.

They all joined in the search for LaFontaine-Greywind, whose body was found by kayakers along the Red River nine days after she disappeared. The river, which runs from southern North Dakota into Canada, has been the dumping site of hundreds of Indigenous people's bodies over the years, according to the Sovereign Bodies Institute, a group working to document such cases in North America.

LaFontaine-Greywind was murdered, and her baby was cut from her womb. The child survived despite the violent ordeal. And the case sparked international outcry and even a bill in Congress that has yet to pass.

After LaFontaine-Greywind's death, Buffalo helped form the local task force and a handful of women joined in the effort. Now, they help out with the annual MMIP March on Feb. 14, an event started locally by the awareness group Sing Our Rivers Red. They use their Facebook page to provide resources and raise awareness when people go missing. They set up booths at local events, and they organize viewings of relevant documentaries and artwork.

"We have to be more proactive," Buffalo said. "And often-times, it takes a horrific thing for people to take action." They're not the only ones taking action, though. Grassroots movements are popping up across the Plains in the form of organizations, civilian search crews, and awareness walks and rallies.

One local artist created a piece to start conversations about the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people. One group of activists walked 550 miles along the Red River from Wahpeton, N.D., to Lake Winnipeg, Canada, to pray for the water and the Indigenous people who have been dumped in it. One group of horseback riders traveled 200 miles from Santee, Neb., to South Dakota's capital city to honor missing and murdered women. One Indigenous designer has modeled entire fashion shows to raise awareness of missing aunts, moms, daughters and sisters. One North Dakota woman has dedicated her life to searching for missing and murdered Indigenous people.

And hundreds of people have gathered to march in rallies and look for missing people as families across the Plains struggle with no answers when their loved ones go missing.

"This is a spiritually motivated movement," said searcher Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase.

Yellow Bird-Chase, 51, gave up her Fargo career as a welder to become a full-time searcher for what she calls the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous relatives. "Every generation almost is missing a relative," she said.

Even the license plate on her black SUV reads "SEARCH."



Lissa Yellow Bird-Chase of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation searches for missing and murdered Indigenous people full time. Her license plate is seen here.



Rose Grusing last saw her sister, Beverly Ozuna Ulrich, more than 16 years ago. She's been looking for her ever since.

Yellow Bird-Chase, a member of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation on the Fort Berthold Reservation, started searching for missing people almost a decade ago. She's since created the Sahnish Scouts of North Dakota, a handful of people who help her search, and she's worked on cases across the country, from the Dakotas, Montana and Minnesota to Iowa, Oklahoma and Nebraska, all the way to California.

She quit her job in Fargo, spent her retirement savings and the money made from selling her house — all in the name of searching for the missing.

"If there's someone out there missing, I'll do whatever I have to do to find them," she said.

She's a self-taught sleuth. And she's tough. "I live, breathe and sing missing and murdered," she said.

Olivia Lone Bear went missing on the Fort Berthold Reservation in the fall of 2017. The following summer, Yellow Bird-Chase took her boat, equipped with sonar, onto Lake Sakakawea. A young, hopeful searcher, who tagged

along, watched the sonar and located the truck Lone Bear was last seen in underwater. Once pulled from the water, Lone Bear was found in the vehicle.

Yellow Bird-Chase also helped in the search for Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, and in the search for Melissa Eagleshield, who went missing near Detroit Lakes, Minn., in 2014.

Besides looking on her own, she trains new searchers. From that, she said half a dozen other search crews have sprouted. Over the years, she's gotten new resources for the Sahnish Scouts, too. Besides a boat and sonar, the crew now has access to a dozen dogs that can detect human remains, and soon she'll learn how to use ground-penetrating radar.

Yellow Bird-Chase's family wanted her to stop searching for missing people a long time ago, though. Her mom said it's a drain on her. But she's independent, determined.

For Yellow Bird-Chase, the hardest part isn't the searching. It's watching the families devastated by the loss of their loved

ones go into "dark places," she said. "Do you know how heart-breaking it is to watch families go through that?"

Sixty-two-year-old Rose Grusing of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in South Dakota has been in that dark place for 16 years.

Her younger sister Beverly Ozuna Ulrich went missing on Oct. 17, 2003, and hasn't been heard from since.

Grusing has long lived in Belle Fourche, S.D., just northwest of Rapid City. Her sister also lived in the town before she went missing. In the 16 years since Beverly was last seen, Grusing lost three of her brothers, and two sisters, too. Before that, she lost her mom, and another brother and sister to cancer. Now she and her oldest brother are the only two left.

Grusing has long thought about leaving town, starting over. But she can't.

"I can't leave her," she said of her missing sister. "I'd be abandoning her."

As the youngest girl, Beverly was the most spoiled growing

HOW TO GET HELP

If you or someone you know is a victim of violence, please consider calling the National Indian Women Resource Center at 406-477-3896 or the StrongHearts Native Helpline at 1-844-762-8483. In an emergency situation, please call 911.

up, Grusing said. And she was easygoing, like her mom, too. Grusing said after their parents' divorce, their mother started heavily drinking alcohol, and eventually, the kids were split up into foster homes. Beverly, she said, was traumatized by her foster home experience.

Two of Beverly's daughters, Stevie and Katrina, continue to update a Facebook page made for their missing mother. "It's another year without Mom," her daughter Stevie posted on what would have been her 69th birthday this year. "Just know we will never give up until we have you home and just for you!"

Once the family realized Beverly was missing, they tried figuring out where she was on their own, Grusing said. A few days later, they reported her missing to law enforcement. Butte County Sheriff Fred Lamphere said Beverly was last seen in the nearby town of Spearfish before a friend brought her back to Belle Fourche. He estimated law enforcement has conducted seven or eight separate searches since Beverly went missing.

"We don't really have a crime scene. We don't have a location someone went missing from," he said. It's now considered a cold case.

Lamphere said foul play is suspected in her disappearance and that law enforcement has a "very strong suspect." There's just not enough evidence to charge the person. The sheriff said his office is always open to any new leads or evidence.

After 16 years, Grusing said she's lost faith in investigators. She's often called on psychics or medicine men to help look for her sister and even ventured out to search with other family members. "It makes you crazy because you don't know what happened," Grusing said.

Besides searching, Grusing helps organize an annual candlelight vigil in remembrance of Beverly each year at the First Congregational Church in Belle Fourche. And she tries to get the word out, telling her sister's story.

"I don't want people to forget her," she said.

Not knowing for 16 years has been the hardest part, Grusing said. She still thinks about Beverly every day, all day.

"I even still have that little tiny glimmer of hope that she'll show up at my door."

Readers can reach Native American issues reporter Natasha Rausch, a Report for America corps member, at 701-241-5528, nr21@forumcomm.com or @rausch21.