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Black Lives Matter demonstration draws conflicting groups in Brainerd

By Gabriel Lagarde
Staff Writer

If Monday's gathering in Brainerd is any indication, Black Lives Matter demonstrations are losing little momentum as the calendar flips from June to July — more than a month since the May 25 death of George Floyd that sparked protests and unrest in all 50 states and across the globe.

In Brainerd, more than 50 demonstrators gathered at 5:30 p.m., Monday, July 6, at the intersection of Washington and Sixth streets, hoisting signs that advocated for racial equality, equal justice under the law and a shared sense of humanity that crosses barriers of color — a demonstration that, in

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Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Above, top: Several people hold signs as traffic passes by during a Brainerd Area Coalition For Peace Black Lives Matter vigil Monday, July 6, at the corner of South Sixth and Washington streets in Brainerd. Above: Sarah (left), Camryn and Hudson Good hold their signs Monday, July 6, during the Brainerd Area Coalition for Peace Black Lives Matter vigil at the corner of South Sixth and Washington streets in Brainerd.



Kelly Humphrey / Brainerd Dispatch

Brainerd City Hall on April 8, 2020.

Brainerd takes step to reopen city hall to public

By Theresa Bourke
Staff Writer

Brainerd City Hall will soon be open to the public on a controlled basis.

With interior renovations nearly complete, staff is moving back into the building and just about ready to serve constituents in person again, the city council learned Monday, July 6. Work got pushed back for a time after a minor roof fire in May. Ceiling tiles in third floor offices that sustained water damage after the fire were replaced last week. Cubicle walls will be installed and desks moved this week.

Once everything is complete and the necessary technology is in place and city hall opens, members of the public will be encouraged to make an appointment before coming to city hall, though they will be

able to come without an appointment as well. Upon arrival, people will have to ring a doorbell, which will contain a video camera, allowing staff to be notified and see who is at the door. Staff will then be able to hit a release switch to unlock the door and let a visitor in. Funds for this technology will be paid for by funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

Upon entrance, visitors will be met with a health questionnaire to fill out, a copy of guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hand sanitizer and masks, though masks will not be required.

The police and fire departments will continue to be closed to the public, and the parks and recreation board will decide

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Baxter man faces felony charges for ramming vehicle into trooper's squad

A 39-year-old Baxter man is accused of ramming his vehicle into a Minnesota State Patrol squad car during a police pursuit.

Jason Aaron Rakauskas was charged Monday, July 6, in Crow Wing County District Court in Brainerd with three felonies — first-degree assault

using deadly force against a peace officer, second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon and fleeing in a motor vehicle from peace officers.

According to the criminal complaint, a state trooper was attempting to make a traffic stop at 1:15 a.m. Thursday when the driver, later identified as Rakauskas, failed to stop. The trooper pursued the vehicle into Rakauskas' yard in Baxter. The vehicle turned

around in the yard and departed west on Fairview Road.

During the course of the pursuit, the suspect vehicle stopped in the middle of the road and reversed, striking the trooper's marked patrol car, the court document stated. The suspect vehicle then continued, fleeing forward before again braking suddenly, stopping again in the middle of the road. The trooper pulled to the side

of the suspect vehicle to avoid striking it, and was then positioned with the driver's side door in front of Rakauskas' vehicle.

Rakauskas' vehicle then allegedly accelerated, slamming into the trooper's squad at the driver's side door, disabling the vehicle. The trooper was able to get out of the squad car using the passenger side door. Rakauskas'

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Drivers with guns get new guidance after push from Philando Castile's mother

By Dana Ferguson
Forum News Service

ST. PAUL — Minnesota drivers should alert police officers if they have a firearm in their vehicle and expect officers to introduce themselves and let them know why they've been pulled over for a traffic stop under new guidance set to be added to state driver's manuals.

The changes announced Monday, July 6, come four years to the day after Philando Castile was killed by a St. Anthony police officer. Castile's mother Valerie Castile pushed for the change aimed at reducing misunderstanding and instances of deadly force between officers and drivers.

Philando Castile was pulled over on July 6, 2016, and told officer

Jeronimo Yanez he had a legal firearm in the vehicle. Yanez shot Castile while Diamond Reynolds, Castile's girlfriend, live-streamed the encounter and as Castile's young daughter looked on from the backseat.

The new guidance for motorists and trained police and peace officers in Minnesota recommends that drivers keep their hands on the steering wheel rather than reaching about the car if they're pulled over. And it instructs officers to identify themselves, ask for identification and proof of insurance and explain to drivers why they've been asked to stop.

Valerie Castile said the change was one of several proposals put forth by a commission on police



Dana Ferguson / Forum News Service

Valerie Castile spoke with reporters Monday, July 6, 2020, in St. Paul about a new driver's manual direction for Minnesota motorists carrying a firearm. Castile's son Philando Castile was killed by St. Anthony police in 2016.

deadly force encounters that could prevent additional deaths. And she said it could be a first step in improving the safety of traffic stops in Minnesota. "It's been four years now and it seems like yesterday," Castile said of her son's death. "This little tidbit is very, very important. That bit of information can save lots of lives

because you don't know what you're going to get when the police walk up to your car."

So far, a slate of other proposals has failed to gain bipartisan support in the state Legislature. Conversations there were pushed forward as a priority after another

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many respects, mirrored a prior demonstration at the same location on May 28.

The event was sponsored by the Brainerd Area Coalition for Peace, which also planned to host a meeting in Gregory Park later that evening.

Unlike the May 28 gathering, this protest featured a counter-demonstration from 10-15 people largely clustered on the south side of the intersection, many of whom carried flags bearing the stars and stripes, as well as blue Trump 2020 campaign banners and "All Lives Matter" signs.

Black Lives Matter

For Davonn Epps, a woman of color, and her friend Brittany Egan — both Brainerd residents who attended the May 28 demonstration — Monday's event was encouraging. She said the assembly of people was a sign that protests in late May and early June weren't a passing fad, but represent a real push for positive change.

"It's not a trend anymore, it's an actual movement that's been consistent for this whole month," Epps said. "It's beautiful to see people are still caring about Black Lives Matter instead of just posting something, then giving the problem a blind eye."

"I don't want my kids and my grandkids having to fight for the things I've had to fight for, definitely after the civil rights movement like we're still fighting," Epps later said.

In turn, Egan expressed hope that real, substantive change is on the horizon, even in the little ways that law enforcement can become more fair and humane in their interactions with people of color.



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Greg Spaid waves and holds a sign across the street from the Brainerd Area Coalition for Peace Black Lives Matter vigil Monday, July 6. The group expressed their views on the south side of Washington Street during the vigil.



It's beautiful to see people are still caring about Black Lives Matter instead of just posting something, then giving the problem a blind eye.

DAVONN EPPS

"My biggest fear was that when it comes time for change, it's gonna be the same thing happening and nothing's gonna change," Egan said. "My hope is, is that — by people still protesting — at the very least that when an officer sees that, they think twice before they act on impulse, that's at least something that crosses their mind."

In the perspective of Marianne Milloy, formerly of Brainerd, she said the recent iteration of Black Lives Matter has shed a light on police brutality and racism — whether it echoed her own experience as a mother to a Black son, or opened her eyes to racist aspects of American history. She said the issue of dismantling statues and monuments across the country served as a point where she learned of many racial atrocities committed by revered historical figures and American Founding Fathers.

With that in mind, Milloy said she has hope this will represent a turn for the better.

"This is great," Milloy said. "I have a really good feeling that our country is going to change and be what we thought it was and what we want it to be."

All Lives Matter

Not all who showed up for the gathering on Washington and Sixth streets were in favor of Black Lives Matter, with some denouncing the gathering as misguided, divisive and ungrateful.

Hank Mullen of Nisswa said the Black Lives Matter movement ignores the detrimental effects of Black on Black crime and noted 19 of the nation's top 20 cities for racial violence are governed by Democrats.

"I'm just sick and tired of everything that's going on," Mullen said. "All the other cities where

they're murdering Blacks ... if they really cared about the Black people, they would have the law enforcement in there and clean it up, and they could do it in about a week."

Mullen said the protesters would abandon Black Lives Matter if they knew what it actually stood for and blamed a sissified culture of participation trophies and ungratefulness for civil unrest among younger people across the country.

"These people have never had an opportunity to have it hard. They've been given everything," Mullen said. "They've been given anything, everything to them their whole life. When they were young, they always got a trophy. They've never had any hardships. And if they hate it so bad here, why don't they go to a country that they like better?"

Dave Brabern, a resident of Brainerd,

said he respected the First Amendment rights of Black Lives Matter protesters, but criticized the movement as, in his perspective, radical, insular, divisive and lacking common sense. As someone who grew up in the '80s, Brabern said it was not only a time when he enjoyed Black artists like Run DMC and Sir Mix-a-Lot, but also a time when people were able to live in solidarity and security with one another.

"I'm real tired about what's going on in this country," Brabern said. "We got a bunch of leftist Marxist people coming in. I don't think that they're getting the whole picture. I think every human being on this planet has a purpose — everybody, all lives, not one specific group. ... I think it's time for us to stand up as Americans and go back to what I remember growing up."

Down the line, Gabriella Miller said she's experienced racism firsthand in Brainerd, but not the kind that Black Lives Matter may acknowledge — namely, racism perpetuated on whites by Black people. Differences of opinion have to be accepted across society, she noted, but there also has to be respect for the nation and American institutions.

"They hate us for no reason. I grew up with a different point of view because of these specific different people," Miller said. "I'm a Trump supporter and yes some of the things going on in America are not great. I understand that, but we also need to think about — I see all of these videos going around online of people, burning the American flag. People have died for our freedom and that's not OK."

GABRIEL LAGARDE may be reached at gabe.lagarde@brainerddispatch.com or 218-855-5859. Follow at www.twitter.com/glbrddispatch.

GUNS

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police-involved death — that of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes as Floyd pleaded for help. Floyd later died at a hospital nearby.

Activists in Minnesota and beyond have called for reforms to state policing laws following Floyd's killing.

Department of Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington said he would make the firearms change independent of the Legislature because it could help make traffic stops safer for drivers and officers and would allow for consistent policy across the state.

"As we know all too well, traffic stops can turn deadly, as did the one where Philando Castile lost his life. And one way we believe to reduce the danger is to have a clear understanding of what should happen during a traffic stop," Harrington said. "Our message to drivers and law enforcement really is we want to make sure that traffic safety doesn't lead to a personal tragedy."

Under the new rules, drivers will be asked to notify an officer that they have a firearm in the vehicle and say where the weapon is if they're pulled over. New state guidance urges drivers in that position to keep their hands on the steering wheel as an officer approaches rather than reach around in the car or leave the vehicle.

"Throughout this, the officers should show you respect," Assistant Commissioner of Public Safety Booker Hodges said. "You should expect respect from police officers."

Lawmakers could again take up additional reform measures later this month as they return to the Capitol for a special legislative session.

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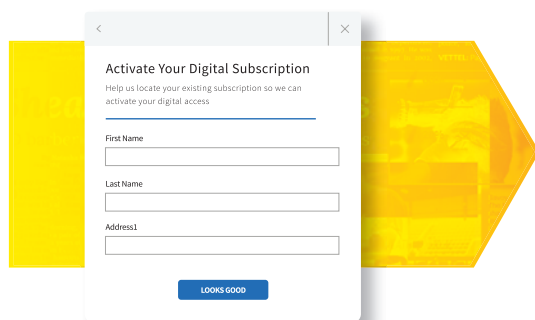


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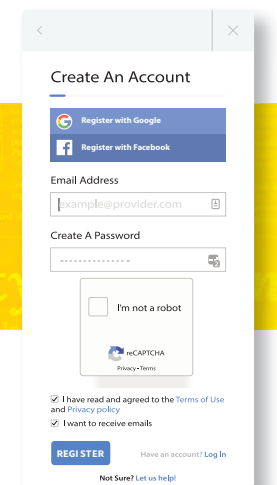
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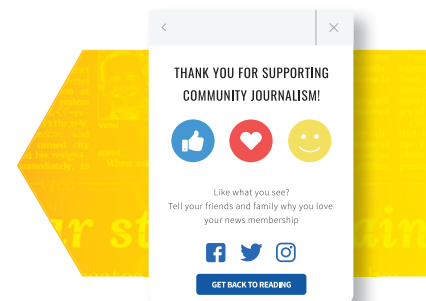
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