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Wild and Free Wildlife Program Coordinator Alex Witkowski feeds some of the 25 white-tailed deer fawns Monday, July 6, at the wildlife rehabilitation facility in Garrison. Well-meaning people often find fawns and feel they are saving them from harm by bringing the little ones to Wild Free, but in reality, the mothers are likely just off feeding.

Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

WILD AND FREE AIMS TO REHAB AND EDUCATE, URGES PEOPLE TO THINK BEFORE 'RESCUING' FAWNS

By Theresa Bourke
Staff Writer

Garrison

From rehabilitating a whole host of wild baby animals, to collecting funds for a new enclosure, to trying to educate the community, Wild and Free is a busy place.

The nonprofit wildlife rehabilitation facility in Garrison works with orphaned baby animals as small as squirrels all the way up to bears, and most species in between. Just like any other organization this year, Wild and Free felt the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, but the faithful volunteers

and workers continue their mission to help wild animals through both rehabilitation and educational efforts. "Our mission is to rescue, rehab and then release animals back into the wild," General Manager Mary Roach said Monday, July 6, while giving the Dispatch a tour of the facility. She emphasized Wild and Free is not in the business of cuddling, petting or ultimately taming any of the animals. Their goal is to re-release the wild creatures back into their native habitat.

More than 714 animals came

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Protesters face off over Gazelka's stance on police accountability

By Gabriel Lagarde
Staff Writer

BAXTER — The Black Lives Matter movement arrived Friday, July 10, at the workplace of Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, R-Nisswa, to demand more police accountability from the state's most powerful Republican.

The protest presented an intense contest of wills, typified by heated face-to-face arguments and shouted chants, with a number of people in both camps working to facilitate calm and understanding during flashpoints of disagreement. Protesters and counter-protesters gathered on Fairview Road in front of Gazelka's insur-



Competing groups of protesters face off Friday, July 10, on Fairview Road in Baxter.

Photo Gallery & Video
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block to common sense, evidence-based legislation intended to curb police brutality and protect vulnerable communities. On

ance office, where he works as an agent. Protesters characterized Gazelka as a road-

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Regional theaters grapple with changed Hollywood landscape

By Frank Lee
Staff Writer

For Rialto Theatre owner Kirk Peysar, the show must go on.

Hollywood studios have either put production of their new films on hiatus or pushed back their release dates of completed films because of the coronavirus pandemic, but Peysar persists.

"We were closed from roughly the middle of March through the middle of June," said Peysar, who sold to-go popcorn to generate some income before reopening in June. "We were obviously disappointed ... but we did so out of necessity and safety for our customers in our community."

The Aitkin movie theater is not alone in its predicament. The Grand Makwa Cinema in Onamia informed callers in a recorded announcement it remains closed until further notice, and the Bear Pause Theater in Hackensack seems to be another business casualty of COVID-19.

"Bear Pause Theater is sad to report that because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the governor's restrictions on theaters, we will

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Submitted photo / Kirk Peysar

The Rialto Theatre marquee promotes its showing of the classic hit musical "Grease" starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John.

Bean Hole Days are a go, with modifications

Register online for scheduled time to get your beans

By Nancy Vogt
Echo Journal Editor

After hosting a modified Stars & Stripes Days celebration with fireworks, a craft fair and a patriotic march by the American Legion #49 Color Guard, the Pequot Lakes Chamber of Commerce jumps right

To register

Visit <https://business.pequotlakes.com/events>

to its next summertime event - Bean Hole Days.

The Tuesday-Wednesday, July 14-15, event also will be modified and carried out a bit differently

than usual. Most notable will be the absence of the long line of people waiting to get their free bowl of beans, bun and beverage in Trailside Park.

Instead, because of state regulations resulting from COVID-19, people must

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DFL to increase pressure for police reforms in return to special session

By Dana Ferguson
Forum News Service

ST. PAUL — Days before Minnesota lawmakers were expected to return to the Capitol for a special legislative session, the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party said it would put pressure on Republican legislators to pass police accountability measures in the wake of George Floyd's killing.

DFL party leaders on Friday, July 10, announced they would

hold a rally in support of the measures Saturday and launch digital ads targeting GOP senators in swing districts. The moves were aimed at getting the GOP-led Senate to approve police reform measures approved by the DFL-controlled House.

But as legislative leaders continued closed-door discussions about police accountability, bonding and other top priorities, it wasn't clear that the partisan nudge would help forge a

compromise. Just days earlier, Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, said lawmakers should tone down the campaigning and focus on passing a public construction project and police reforms.

Partisan disagreements stymied efforts to pass a bonding bill and a slate of policing law changes last month and lawmakers left a one-week special session with little to show for it. And now they'll get a do-over as they weigh a veto of Walz's

expanded authority under the peacetime emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal justice reform and a bonding bill.

DFL Party Chairman Ken Martin said party launched digital ads urging constituents to call eight Republican senators to urge them to approve the package of police accountability bills put forth by the People of Color and Indigenous Caucus.

"No matter how hard they try,

Senate Republicans cannot keep ignoring the demands for real police reform coming from their constituents," Martin said in a news release. "Minnesotans will be watching next week's special session closely. If Senate Republicans walk away from their jobs without getting anything done yet again, they should not expect to keep them."

Republicans have made a point

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WILD

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through their doors last year, and about 250 made it back home.

"Which you may say doesn't sound very good, but for those 250 it meant a lot," Roach said. "Our rehabilitation rate was around 35%. Most rehabbers are around 33%, so we're proud of the work we do here. And actually that's a higher rate than animals survive in the wild alone."

Wild and Free is the only facility in Minnesota that can rehabilitate bears, as founder Dr. Debbie Eskedahl has a master class permit in wildlife rehab and Dr. Katie Baratto has a general permit. All the animals housed at Wild and Free go through Garrison Animal Hospital first, where the doctors examine them and determine the best course of care.

Right now, staff and volunteers are taking care of nine orphaned bear cubs. Because of such a wet fall season last year, farmers weren't able to plow their fields, and bears made themselves at home in the tall vegetation.

"So this spring when (farmers) started to combine, many of these sows — which are female adult bears — were either hit by the combines or scared off and ran and never came back to get their babies," Roach said, noting another incident occurred when a logger accidentally hit a bear den. He waited for the mom to return, but she never did.



Photos by Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Great horned owls perch on a branch Monday, July 6, in their cage at Wild and Free Wildlife Rehabilitation Program in Garrison.

The bears will be at Wild and Free until next spring, as they work to gain weight and bulk up to the 50 pounds needed to hibernate. Feeding the bears requires staff to wear a special "bear suit," composed of some sort of poncho and mosquito net, anything to avoid the bears getting too comfortable with humans.

After the bears fill themselves with food all winter, the Department of Natural Resources will come to sedate them, do some field studies and drive them two hours north of Grand Rapids to release them back into the wild.

Other animals at Wild and Free right now include raccoons, squirrels, coyotes, gray foxes, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, homing pigeons, kestrels, ducklings, cygnets (baby swans), barred owls, great horned owls, a screech owl and a mink.

One of the barred owls began its transition back into the wild Monday, when

Roach and Wildlife Program Coordinator Alex Witkowski released it on the property. The owl sat on the ground for a little while, perhaps stunned at its newfound freedom, before flying up into the trees. A wooden platform high up on the balcony contains a white mouse as an easy food source for the owl at first. Witkowski and Roach said it may hang around for a while before flying off on its own.

When they're ready to go, young swans are introduced to parents with babies a similar size of the swans being released. Otherwise, Roach said the parents will kill the newcomers. But Wild and Free has so far been successful at finding the right swan parents for their babies.

"They took them with open wings," Roach said of previously released swans. "... I'm always amazed at the wild animals. They are so willing to adopt other babies."

Several turtle eggs are

buried on site, too. When female turtles carrying eggs get hit by a car, doctors will perform a cesarean section to remove the eggs.

"Especially Blanding's turtles, which are an endangered species," Witkowski said. "Not many places can rehab them, but we'll take them in, and we'll bury the eggs, and hopefully they'll hatch."

A couple animals Roach noted they won't take in are wolves, which go up to the International Wolf Center in Ely, and skunks.

Stolen fawns

While the idea of Wild and Free is to rehab orphaned babies, the sad reality for the 25 fawns at the facility is they may not have been orphaned at all but rather stolen from their mothers.

"Unfortunately, good-hearted people think that they're going to do right by bringing the fawns to us and saving them, and most often that isn't the case," Roach said.

Does can wander and graze for more than eight hours at a time, building up their milk supply to feed their fawns. But the babies often can't keep up for that long, so their moms will attempt to hide them before leaving to feed.

"The doe will come back and then wonder where the fawn is, and we have them," Roach said. "It's really important that fawns get the first mother's milk. They're much more equipped, I would say, to successfully feed that fawn than we are. And so bringing the fawn to us is not a guarantee that that

fawn is going to survive either, but we do the best we can."

Generally, if a fawn is looking alert and being very still, it's probably fine. If it's crying, humans should back away, as it might just be crying for its mom to say it's hungry, and does will not come back if people are around.

"But if it's crying and walking around, or if you know a doe got hit on the road, or if its ears are curling a little bit, call us," Roach said. "No matter what, call us, and we'll tell you what to look for."

If a fawn is injured or bleeding, or if there are a lot of insects around its butt, Roach said there is likely a problem. Otherwise, leave them alone.

"These fawns, I would say, are stolen from their mamas," she said. "That's what we have are stolen babies."

At least one of the fawns at Wild and Free is most definitely an orphan, though. Nicknamed the "miracle fawn," this baby was born on impact when it's pregnant mother was hit by a car. It miraculously survived and is doing well.

Along with fawn protocol, Roach said Wild and Free works to educate the public on issues like environmental preservation and the dangers of lead ammunition.

Flight pen and public involvement

A new flight pen is under construction for Wild and Free's feathery residents. The 4,000-square-foot building will have easy-to-clean fiberglass reinforced

panel walls and two swing gates to provide the ability to separate different species of birds from one another.

"You may not know this, but you cannot put owls with eagles with hawks. They will kill each other," Roach said. "And you can't have barred owls with great horned owls. You have to have specific places for each species, and that's where we're going to have flexibility here with the swing gates to be able to have different species and different paths."

While construction has begun, Roach said Wild and Free still needs about \$75,000 to complete it. Due to COVID-19, they were not able to go through with their capital campaign this year as planned, and the organization is fully funded through donations. But once they get back to their "new normal," Roach hopes to raise more money.

Those interested in donating can call 320-692-4180 or visit wildandfree.org or the Wild and Free Facebook page.

"We're really excited to be able to be assured that these animals are ready to go when we're going to put them back into the wild," Roach said of the birds that will use the flight pen.

What to do with orphaned animals

Those who find wild baby animals they think might be orphaned can call the Garrison Animal Hospital 24/7 at 320-692-4180, and an on-call veterinarian will answer and assist.

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PROTESTERS

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the other side, counter-protesters defended Gazelka and denounced Black Lives Matter as dangerous and disingenuous. At various points, arguments reached a fever pitch but did not escalate into violence.

The protest was a conglomeration of activists, both from local communities and the Twin Cities metro, with affiliated organizations like Twin Cities Coalition for Justice 4 Jamar, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Communities United Against Police Brutality, and the Minnesota Disability Justice Network, among others.

Roughly two-thirds of those present stood on the Black Lives Matter side, while a third accounted for a counter-protest gathering. In addition, protest organizers expressed concerns a right-leaning militia group was present on the south side of Highway 210.

Baxter Police Chief Jim Exsted confirmed a group contacted him Thursday and he requested they remain on the highway's south side, but noted they did not identify themselves and he could not confirm if they were a militia. He noted he would have made the same request of Black Lives Matter protesters if they contacted him in the same manner. Individuals equipped with firearms could be seen throughout the

counter-protest gathering.

Jaylani Hussein, the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Minnesota, described Gazelka as a barrier to legislative efforts to protect people of color from state violence. Furthermore, he said the Nisswa-based lawmaker not only hampered these bills, but promoted a status quo of white supremacy during his tenure in St. Paul.

"Senator Gazelka has played defense in a time when the entire country saw how we really need to move on policies that do not criminalize poverty and black people in this country," Hussein said. "Senator Gazelka is well known for doing this and standing to support state violence. ... Senator Gazelka is someone who stands with police, even if they kill people of color. He has never made any effort in the past, or any time, to show that he actually understands what is happening in this country — the racism, the slavery, what led us to this moment."

"We're here to show that all lives are precious," said Ben Ramir, a Minneapolis resident on the Black Lives Matter side. "Everyone's life is significant and we just came here because Gazelka has blocked every kind of legislation that is intended to help the undocumented, the brown people, the black people — the people who want to break their chains."

On the counter-protest side,

organizer Doug Kern said Black Lives Matter was off-base in its criticism and its efforts to, in his words, dismantle or disband police departments were tantamount to insanity while hundreds of people are being murdered in urban centers like Chicago.

"I don't care what their color are, these people's lives matter," said Kern, who proceeded to read the names of more than 400 murder victims in Chicago throughout Friday's protest. "The point of the microphone is to say their names. Remember, these are murder victims and police protect us from these idiots and criminal activity."

Paul Edwards, a resident of Brainerd, said the Black Lives Matter movement lost all credibility the moment the first stone shattered a shop window amid riots that broke out during peaceful protests in Minneapolis.

"I subscribe to what Martin Luther King said to judge people by the content of their character, not the color of their skin," Edwards said. "But then raises the question — how do you determine the content of their character? By their actions. When someone picks up a brick and throws it through the storefront, that's the content of their character. When the police officer killed George Floyd, the contents of his character were definitely revealed by the same token."

Organizers noted while Black Lives Matter is often portrayed as a left-leaning movement, pro-

testers were expressing dissatisfaction with leadership from both major parties, in the city, state and federal levels. On Wednesday, protesters gathered at the home of House Speaker Melissa Hortman, a DFLer, while they directed their ire at Gazelka in much the same spirit.

"We're not saying, 'Bad Republican, good Democrat,' or anything like that. We're a pox on both houses," said Michelle Gross of Communities United Against Police Brutality, who criticized Hortman as complicit with Gazelka in hamstringing efforts to reform law enforcement. "We didn't just come up with this. These are sound, evidence-based recommendations to improve the police."

Gross said lawmakers were presented with 44 recommendations for improvement in areas as wide-ranging as civil protections, civilian oversight, funding for mental health agencies to address nonviolent domestic issues, among others — all of which, she said, Gazelka has stonewalled and refused to engage in good faith, while Hortman has made backroom deals to circumvent these efforts.

In turn, it's been nearly impossible to reach lawmakers behind concrete walls, barbed wire fences and armed security down in St. Paul, she noted, while politicians like Gazelka and Hortman refuse to answer emails, phone calls or meeting requests. While, as an activist, Gross said she's usually

opposed to imposing on people's homes and places of work, current circumstances forced protesters to take their message to the recipients directly.

While Gazelka didn't make an appearance during the protests in front of his business Friday, during an interview Thursday he stated the GOP offered 11 different forms of police reform to his counterparts on the DFL side, but he would not capitulate to a movement that looks to disband law enforcement across the state. DFL lawmakers in the House and Senate have previously released statements disbanding the police is not a goal they intend to pursue. Gazelka noted this assessment was based on the decisions of the Minneapolis City Council.

"We are not blocking police accountability measures," Gazelka said. "We refuse to defund or dismantle the police."

Later Friday night, protests continued along Washington Street in Brainerd, with those in support of Black Lives Matter on the north side and people displaying Trump signs and American flags on the other side. The windows of Advanced Auto Parts, which is located near the site of the protests, were preemptively covered with plywood ahead of the expected demonstrations.

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Welcome

Jon Peterson, DPM

Lakewood is please to announce the arrival of our new on-staff podiatrist, Dr. Jon Peterson. Dr. Peterson specializes in the area of foot and ankle care and brings with him over 29 years of experience serving patients.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Peterson, call 218-894-1515.



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