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Anoka County keeps preliminary tax levy flat

Conner Cumiskey
ABC Newspapers

Anoka County will not increase its 2021 levies, providing some relief to taxpayers suffering from the coronavirus pandemic.

County commissioners approved a \$141.9 million preliminary property tax levy, a 0% increase, on Sept. 22. Commissioners also approved \$1.75 million preliminary public safety levy, which is the same as the previous year.

"I will say that I personally was really surprised that we're even able to do this," Commissioner Mandy Meisner said.

Meisner explained that it seemed counterintuitive, based on the demands for service the county is receiving. However, she noted the county also is spending less on things like travel and similar expenses.

"I'm thrilled we can look at our taxpayers and say, 'We can hold the line, we can tighten our belt when necessary,'" County Board Chair Scott Schulte said.

Commissioners talked

County Levy see page 4

'R' for Rudy



Submitted photo
A door that opened to a closet posed a unique mystery for the Hildre family who moved into a house on North Shore Trail: What did the "R" carved into it stand for?

A new homeowner turns 75-year-old door into the perfect gift

Hannah Davis
News Editor

When Ben and Jessica Hildre were looking for a home in Forest Lake, they knew they wanted to stay away from the cookie-cutter house models and find a home with character and a history.

The couple, who both are St. Francis-natives, found that special house in October 2018 along North Shore Trail on Forest Lake. Little did the couple know just how much history that house had and how one door would turn into a special connection.

Something unique caught their eye when they looked at the house: an "R" carved into the door of what is now a closet in the upper-floor bedroom.

"When we bought the house, I was so curious, what did that mean?" Ben recalled. The room was given to their daughter Haiden, now 7.

"I thought it stood for rainbows," Haiden said.

Ben and Jessica did some online research about the area, hoping to come up with an idea of what it could mean, but found nothing and guessed it was a name. They were right, but they wouldn't know it for a little more a year later.

In January, the couple and their kids joined other neighbors on the lake for a bonfire and fun on the ice.

"An older couple came walking up and introduced themselves," Ben said.

That couple was Rudy and Mary Olson, who live less than a mile away from the Hildres also along North Shore Trail.

"He said, 'I used to live here in the '40s and '50s. This is my family's land. I grew up here,'" Ben said.

Ben had a sense the man just wanted to get to know the new family who lived in that house, especially since a couple of years prior, the owner at the time was originally planning on tearing it down to build a bigger house on the lot before he changed his

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A different — or deferred — college year

How Forest Lake grads are handling their college careers amid pandemic

Joe Hiti
Community Editor

College freshmen have not been given an easy decision this fall.

With coronavirus-related restrictions moving the end of their senior year of high school digitally, this year's college freshman had to decide whether or not they want to shell out thousands of dollars to start their college careers, for the most part, from behind a computer screen. With new policies and procedures put in place, Forest Lake grads are experiencing different situations across the country as classes begin.

For 2020 Forest Lake Area High School graduate Lauryn Wurscher, it was an easy decision. Wurscher is attending Minnesota State University Moorhead, and while it's not ideal, she

has wanted to experience college and is doing whatever she needs to do to get her degree.

"I am very glad to still have the college experience," Wurscher said. "I mean it's obviously not the same as what others have had, but it's my college experience."

Wurscher has not experienced any delay with the start of her school year, as she moved into her dorm in late August. However, she has already experienced her school's new COVID-19 safety precautions firsthand after being in contact with someone who tested positive for the virus. Wurscher was forced to quarantine on campus for two weeks in a dorm building that the school is using for students who are sick or have been in contact with someone that has tested positive.

"It was a very, very weird situation. Just being stuck in a room for two weeks with just my homework and my thoughts," Wurscher said.

Despite never showing symptoms of COVID and testing negative, Wurscher was confined to her room, even having her meals brought to her, so that she would not need to leave for any reason.

On the other hand, fellow 2020 graduate Ally Goehner saw the start of her college career delayed when Grand Canyon University in Arizona pushed back its move-in date for incoming students.

Classes for Goehner began in late August virtually, but what she was missing was the connections she would be making on campus. Goehner has now moved in, making the trip down to Arizona on Sept. 22.

Taking classes closer to home or waiting a semester did cross Goehner's mind. However, her decision was the same as Wurscher's: Now is the time to start school.

"I did contemplate [staying close to home] for a little bit," Goehner said. "But at the same

time I think it's good for me to get out of the house and kind of be on my own for a little bit."

With months of planning going into deciding where they want to pursue their future, Goehner and Wurscher decided against going to a different school or waiting a semester. Both have now begun their college careers, and while it may not be the most ideal or what others have experienced in the past, they are doing their best to make the most of it.

Second-year students

Forest Lake Area 2020 graduates are not the only ones being forced to make a tough decision. Other area college students have also been experiencing a lot of changes after having their freshman years of college cut short due to the pandemic.

Ben Cartford signed his lease to live in Minneapolis so that he and his roommates could be near the University of



Submitted photo

Aria Norcross, pictured here at Yale University, elected to take a semester off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and pursue an internship to help her decide on a career path.

Minnesota campus. Instead, he is now living in a city that is mostly shut down, due to the virus, and is taking almost all of his classes digitally.

"We actually signed our lease in early No-

ember of last year. You really got to do it early if you want one of the good houses," Cartford said. "We didn't know all the stuff that was go-

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News



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Rudy

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mind and sold it.

"I think Rudy liked the fact that he saw the family there like us and said 'It's so great. You're going to love living here like how I did growing up,'" Ben said.

Then Rudy asked a question that clicked with Ben.

"He said, 'Is my 'R' still up on the door?' and I'm like 'What?' and then all the sudden it connects," Ben said.

The doorway that now leads to Haiden's closet was Rudy's old room. Rudy's parents, who moved into the house in 1945 when Rudy was 2 years old, carved the "R" into the door so they could keep an eye on their toddler, and the door stayed through its other owners — some of whom have stayed along North Shore Trail.

"It was a 75-year-old door. It was amazing it was still there," Rudy said.

Rudy discussed the house a bit more with the family, then he and Mary continued walking by.

"After we parted ways that night and I thought 'I got to get that door back to him,'" Ben said. "It's something from his childhood, especially something from that era; I know it'd mean a lot to me if I had something like that."

But Ben wasn't able to get his phone number and didn't catch his



Photo by Hannah Davis

Haiden Hildre stands in the doorway of her closet, what used to be Rudy Olson's room. She wants an "H" cut out into the new door that will replace the one gifted back to Rudy.

full name. Without contact information or a last name to track him down, Ben had hoped to just run into him, assuming he lived nearby. Then the pandemic hit and the stay-at-home orders that followed, and the opportunity to connect with Rudy once again got lost.

Then a chance meeting in August between a friend of Ben's led to that connection: His friend Kyle bid on a job for Rudy, who asked for recommendations for painters in the area. Ben, who owns his own painting business, was Kyle's suggestion for Rudy.

"We connected, and

I thought, well, even if I don't get the job, I'm giving the door back," Ben said.

"I thought it was a good gesture," Jessica said.

Ben got the job and decided to wait until the job was finished to present the door.

"That's when I had the idea to wrap it up and give it to him and wanted to capture his reaction," Ben added.

On his last day, just before he left after all final transactions were made, Ben presented Rudy the door, wrapped in wrapping paper.

"You could tell he was



Rudy Olson stands with the door from his childhood home. Ben Hildre, the current owner of Olson's childhood home, gifted the door back to Rudy.

thinking 'Is this what I think it is?'" Ben said.

Then the wrapping paper came off.

Rudy said in an interview with Kare11: "Is that what I think it is? That's the door. That's my door."

"It was a genuine reaction," Ben said.

"It was fun," Rudy said. "It has a lot of fun memories, and it was a great thing."

"It was a fun experience," Mary remarked.

Ben was just as touched by the connection.

"It's hard to pin the exact feeling. It makes me happy that I made somebody else's day with a small gesture like that. It means a lot to me," he said.

Rudy said he has no specific plans yet for what he's going to do with his childhood door in his current home, but said he has a few ideas.

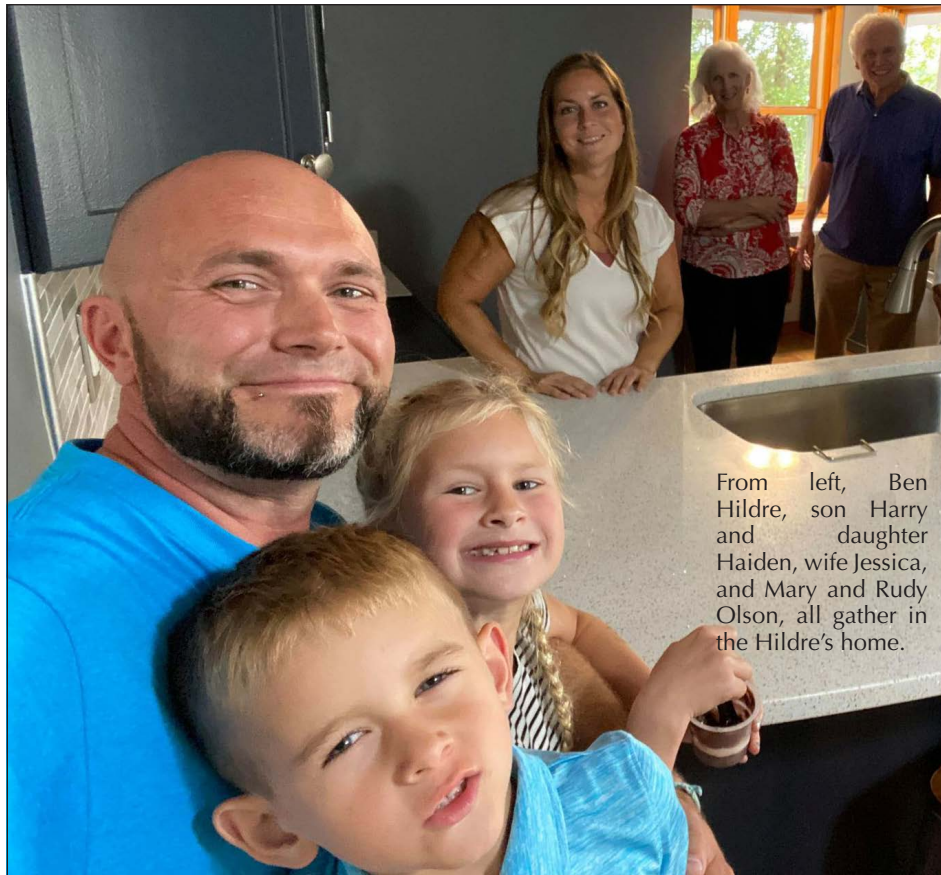
The memories that transpired in and around those walls have been

shared with the newest owners by Rudy and other previous owners, some of whom still live along the lake. They're stories about how the stained glass window ended up in the wall, or childhood memories of hanging from the beams in a bedroom or where the kids would have to shovel coal into the heater, and, of course, the story of the "R" carved into the door. Those are the stories that Jessica and Ben say make the house mean much

more to them than living in a newer home. "It just makes me more attached to it, knowing the background," Jessica said.

"Not a lot of people can own history," Ben added.

Now it's time for a new family to add their own history to the house, and Haiden knows exactly what she wants to add. Her one request for when she gets a new door to her closet installed: an "H" carved into the door, just like Rudy's.



From left, Ben Hildre, son Harry and daughter Haiden, wife Jessica, and Mary and Rudy Olson, all gather in the Hildre's home.



Submitted photos

Rudy, bottom right, is pictured with his family by the house he grew up in on North Shore Trail.



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