



STAR NEWS

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ELK RIVER OTSEGO ROGERS ZIMMERMAN

Wild West Days: 50 years in the making

After last year's cancellation, organization aims for bigger, better

by Jim Boyle
Editor

The Wild West Days have been hanging around Zimmerman for 50 years, starting with a one-day event on July 31, 1971, that kicked things off with a soap box derby and other contests that ranged from baking and button selling to pie-eating, demolition derby, a shooting gallery and a costume contest looking for the most authentic Buffalo Bill and Calamity Jane. Costume contest participants were advised that an ability to ride horses would be beneficial but not necessary. The Zimmerman Civic

Club that planned the event met in the basement of the Catholic church. Organizers said in the Sherburne County Star News dated July 29, 1971, the hope was to make the event one in a long line of annual events. They did more than that. Fifty years later, the event is longer (five days) and it has started earlier (Memorial Day weekend) than some of the first ones. And when it did move to Memorial Day weekend, people complained and it was moved only to backfire. Parade participants and participation by other groups also dwindled

when Princeton resurrected its Rum River Days on the same weekend. The event seems to have settled in on Memorial Day weekend, but things do change.

This year's busy schedule

Zimmerman's annual Wild West Days has already started this week and will run through May 31. Organizers promised after being off for a year, this one will be a "bigger event than ever," according to the event website, zimmermancivicclub.net. A new event being tried

out is a running and walking 5K as well as a kids fun run. The Community Club carnival started on Thursday, May 27, and it will be joined by a food court and run throughout the entire event. There will be a market this whole weekend to shop for various crafts and other wares. This year's Wild West Days downtown Zimmerman parade starts at noon Saturday, May 29. The float winners will be announced at 3 p.m. Throughout the weekend at various times there will be bingo, kids activities and an arcade with bungee trampolines and inflatables. Other sources

of entertainment include pony rides, buggy rides, a silent auction, a saloon serving beer and drinks, an old-time photo booth as well as softball and bean bag tournaments. There will also be a bike and car show. Live music at night under a tent will be provided by Whiskey Pigzz on Friday, May 28; by The Provisional on Saturday, May 29; and by East Central Outlaws on Sunday, May 30. A fireworks show will begin at 10 p.m. May 30. The carnival will continue on Memorial Day, May 31, and there will be American Legion cemetery tributes as well.

That's this year. What about the first year and other years? The Star News looked at some of the early editions of the Sherburne County Star News, the Elk River Star News and the Zimmerman Frontier that have been published by this newspaper over the event's 50-year history. Here's some of the things we found interesting.

First year

WKPM Radio out of Princeton was involved in the inaugural event, helping kick off and Wild West Days to 17



Jodi Walz, at right, played his trumpet during last year's cemetery tour to memorialize area veterans. The former Army Band member and member of the Legion Post 112 Honor Guard died last Nov. 20 from COVID-19.

Walz's son to play taps for his fallen father, veterans

by Jim Boyle
Editor

The same trumpet used to play taps during last year's annual Elk River Memorial Day program will be used again this year. But the person playing it will not be the same. Jodi Walz, a 50-year-old Army veteran and member of American Legion Post 112 with a long history of performing at Memorial Day services, died in his Elk River home on Nov. 20, 2020, from COVID-19. He was known as much for his musical accomplishments in life as anything. He traveled the world performing in

Memorial Day Honor Guard Cemetery Schedule

- 6 a.m. Lakeview, 7400 Old Viking Blvd. NW, Elk River
- 6:15 a.m. Nowthen Memorial
- 6:25 a.m. St. John Lutheran Cemetery, 9231 Viking Blvd. NW Elk River
- 6:45 a.m. Vernon, 30 Evans Ave., Elk River
- 7:40 a.m. Otsego, 8899 Nashua Ave. NE, Otsego
- 7:55 a.m. St. Andrew's, Jackson Avenue, Elk River
- 8:20 a.m. Meadowdale, 22898 Co. Rd. 32, Elk River
- 9:00 a.m. Orono, 18414 Boston St. NW, Elk River
- 9:20 a.m. Bailey Station, Sherburne County Road 14, Elk River
- 9:35 a.m. Veterans Park, Highway 10 just east of Oxford Avenue/west of Dairy Queen in Elk River
- 10 a.m. Memorial Day Program, Rivers Edge Commons Park, 679 Main St NW, Elk River

The Honor Guard will have a rifle salute at each site to honor deceased veterans.

Army bands and passed His oldest son, Ryan Walz, 21, will use his father's trumpet to deliver

an eternal resting call to his father by performing taps at the 10 a.m. program at Rivers Edge Commons Park in downtown Elk River to memorialize more than 20 veterans who have died in the past year. Prior to that he will play taps at tour of local cemeteries and memorials. The college student has performed taps before — five days after his dad's death and on his 21st birthday during Nov. 25, 2020, funeral services at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in St. Paul

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Zimmerman's Hardware Hank owners retire

by Jim Boyle
Editor

After owning and operating Hardware Hank in Zimmerman for more the 30 years, Kevin and Maggie Johnson have sold the independent hardware store and moved into retirement. Maggie was ready, and Kevin, although reluctant, was willing in order to have more time with the couple's five grandkids, a bit more time to travel and a chance to catch up on projects around the house. "Maybe I'll put the trim around the windows," Kevin said recently from a kitchen table that sat kitty corner from the cash registers at their store at 12860 Fremont Ave. He has some reservations about what retirement will be like for him after

a long, good run. His son, Matt Johnson, is not surprised his dad is reluctant but happy for his parents. "My dad has always been motivated by a sense of service to the community," Matt said. "He's always going out of the way to help people. I think he's going to miss that for sure." It was Maggie who followed her husband's lead when they drew up the paperwork to buy the store in 1989. She was a dental hygienist, and Kevin was a machinist. He had long desired a business of his own, sharing the entrepreneurial spirit his father had, owning his own farm, and his uncles had with running businesses of their own. Maggie had her limits, Hardware Hank to 8



Photo by Jim Boyle
Kevin and Maggie Johnson have sold their Hardware Hank store in Zimmerman after 30-plus years of owning and operating it.

Public notices are published in the Star News, beginning on page 18.

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