

### INSIDE

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**Business get a state break**  
**Page 3**



**Local gifts make sense**  
**Page 9**



**Covid surge meets cure**  
**Page 13**

### INDEX

Weather .....	2
News .....	3
Opinion .....	6-7
Obituaries.....	8
EXTRA .....	9-12
Covid update .....	13
Culture .....	14
Community.....	15
Puzzles.....	15
Classifieds.....	16-18
Health .....	19



# Throwback station throws in the towel

## Pete & Sons is closing at end of year

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At the end of 2020 — a year that many would like to forget — Cloquet will lose a long-standing and beloved business when Pete & Sons service station closes.

It's been the best year in recent memory for the 52-year-old business, said John Fink, standing inside the garage at the full-service gas and repair station on the eastern end of Cloquet Avenue.

John and Jerry Fink are the "sons" on the sign. The brothers have been working at the service station since they were youngsters. Jerry's been there 44 years, John for 37.

"You know when you get summer vacation and you think: Oh, we can just sleep in until whatever. We couldn't," Jerry said. "We had to come down and say we are going to work now."

Jerry is 62 and says it's time to retire. John, seven years younger, said he doesn't want to run the business without Jerry. None of their kids are interested in taking over the family business, although John's son did work there for a while.

It's been their life's work. Jerry and John learned all their mechanical know-how and small business skills on the job, courtesy of their father.

Pete passed away in 2004. "He'd probably still be here if he was still alive,"



Jerry Fink closes the door to the repair garage at the Pete & Sons service station in Cloquet while brother John pulls in a car jack. The pair will close the station at the end of the month. It's been providing now rare full-service gas fill-ups since 1968, when it opened simply as Pete's. *Photos by Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

Jerry said, then both men chuckled. "He was one of those breeds that loved work."

Asked what it's been like to work with his brother for so long, John smiles. "I like it," he said. "It's somebody you can trust, somebody who's always got your back."

The full-service station was a bustling place last

Thursday morning with drivers coming in to get a tank of gas and their windshield cleaned by one of the Fink brothers, the station's only employees. In the slower moments, Jerry finishes up a brake job on a Toyota perched high on one of two lifts in the garage.

*Continued on back page*



# Carlton heading toward consolidation cliff

## Stalemate with Wrenshall isn't loosening at all

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The Carlton school board this week firmed up its position when it comes to the current standoff with the Wrenshall board and possible consolidation between the two neighboring districts. On Monday, the Carlton board agreed in a committee of the whole discussion that it would vote at its regular meeting Monday on the question of debt sharing should a consolidation take place. Should the board vote to not

share debt among all taxpayers in a new district, consolidation could be off the table.

At least half of the six-member board indicated Monday that they wanted to vote on the question of consolidating or not next week. Superintendent John Engstrom talked those members off that ledge during the online meeting, saying that taking a stance on consolidation would make it difficult for the boards to bring back consolidation as new members join in January.

"We started it, we should finish it," said longtime Carlton board member Tim Hagenah. He began the conversation about ditching consolidation altogether. "This plan is done and over with," he said. "One district needs to say we're going to go our separate ways."

The Wrenshall board has stood firm, saying that any merger should include putting each district's debt into one pot, with taxpayers in the new district paying the same rate in school tax. The Carlton board has blanched at the idea, noting in a study it conducted earlier this year that under shared debt, Carlton residents would pay more overall tax. If the roughly \$38 million consolidation plan — with improvements made to the elementary in Carlton and the school in Wrenshall — were to go through, a taxpayer in Carlton with a \$150,000 home would pay about \$234 a year if debts stayed with current district taxpayers. With a pooled debt, that same Carlton taxpayer could pay \$265, a difference of \$31 a year.

The Wrenshall board did not

join with Carlton this past summer in seeking out the latest tax impact numbers, saying that numbers would change by the end of this year, and they have. Wrenshall has lowered its tax levy significantly for next year, by just over 16 percent.

"Levies and tax impacts have already changed," said Wrenshall board member Janaki Fisher-Merritt. As far as consolidation, he added, "nothing has changed with us."

Wrenshall board chairwoman Michelle Blanchard said Wrenshall would keep its stance on debt sharing, saying it "only makes sense that everyone (in a new district) pay the same amount. If Carlton supports consolidation, they should uphold debt sharing."

*Continued on Page 5*

## Pete & Sons ...

*Continued from front page*

John handles more of the drive-up customers, but Jerry heads out when he's needed at one or two of the four pumps outside. It's difficult to tell if he just knows when he's needed through the bond of brotherhood or what, but there was no hollering for help when all four gas pumps were full.

"It's a hometown, old-fashioned, local service station that I've really appreciated over the years," said Bruce Jahn. "Pete and his sons, they're part of the fabric of Cloquet."

They have plenty of customers they've known forever, loyal customers. Men and women, young and old. All kinds of people. "I'm sad to see them close," said Cloquet native Dave Luukkala.

As of right now, Pete & Sons is one of two full-service gas stations left in downtown Cloquet; Best Service at the Frank Lloyd Wright designed gas station is the other. There is also one full-service pump at Fond du Lac Gas and Grocery, John pointed out.

They also may be the one place in Cloquet that still has a pay phone in the lobby. "That's our business line actually," John said. He laughed, but it's true.

Business at the full-service station wasn't gouged much by the advent of Kwik Trip into Cloquet. It saw a dip for about a week and then it was back to business as usual.

"We do quite well selling gas,

a lot of people — there's handicapped people, elderly, young people with kids, where they can stay in their vehicle and not have to get out, and in cold weather a lot of people don't like to get out," John said.

So he or Jerry will fill up the tank, wash windows and check fluids if a customer wants him to. They carry off-road diesel, and can refill propane as well as tanks for wire feed welding, oxygen and acetylene and more. Inside they have a diminishing supply of batteries, tires and various fluids for vehicles. The brothers do minor repairs, brake jobs and the like. They both say they've enjoyed working together but it's hard work, and they don't get much time off. The building is for sale. They've had inquiries but no serious offers yet.

Pete & Sons will close the doors on Dec. 31 for good, and John says he's going to take some time to ponder his next step. He's not ready to retire, but he doesn't know what he'll do next. Spend a week with his wife, Mary, that's No. 1 on the bucket list.

"I kind of want to take some time and unwind and destress," John said. "I have a lot of emotions going through: excited, sad, nervous ... there's a lot of stuff, this is the only thing I've ever



Pete & Sons was busy last Thursday, as it has been throughout this pandemic year. Jerry Fink says its time to retire and John says he won't run the business without his older brother. *Photos by Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

done my whole life."

His message to their loyal customers was to the point.

"Thank you for your patronage. Sorry we're closing."



# We're engaging with Minnesota Tribes and creating opportunities for their citizens and communities to benefit.

*How are Tribes being involved in this project?*

At Enbridge, we are proud of our relationships with Indigenous communities, and see them as mutually beneficial—economically, socially and culturally. Our Line 3 replacement marks an unprecedented level of Tribal engagement, inclusion and economic participation.

As part of the Line 3 replacement, we've committed \$100 million for Tribal-affiliated work opportunities, and we're engaging with Minnesota Tribes on training, contracting, procurement and hiring.

A Tribal-led Cultural Resources Survey was completed along the project route. With representatives of nine Tribes doing direct survey work, and more than 30 Tribes involved via government-to-government consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this has been the largest such survey ever attempted in the energy industry.

Most importantly, we've been listening. From the start, we respected the wishes of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to route the new Line 3 around their reservation. We've also signed a 20-year easement renewal with the Fond du Lac Band and made further route changes.

Learn more at [enbridge.com/Line3US](http://enbridge.com/Line3US).

