



HUSKIES WIN BEFORE SHUTDOWN

The Jackson County Central volleyball and football teams won their final contests before the fall sports season was brought to a halt last week.

Stories, B1



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

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BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Jackson native's new song urges unity, not division

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

A Jackson native has released a new song urging unity at a time of great division.

Travis Christensen, who goes by the stage name Travis Bahmer, released his new song, "The Great Divide," and music video via YouTube earlier this month. Reaction to its message has been overwhelming thus far, Christensen said.

"The central message of the song is for people to stop blindly following what they're told and do a little more critical thinking on their own," Christensen said last week from his home in Rapid City, S.D. "I think a lot of the division we're seeing amongst people is very much constructed and fabricated. It's the way things are being portrayed, and it's very much pushing people



Top: Jackson native Travis Christensen rocks the crowd gathered for the most recent Jackson Fireman's Dance while bathed in light the same hues as the promotional cover art he chose for his new song, "The Great Divide" (above).

to one side or the other instead of the reality of the middle, where most of us live. The majority of people aren't as polarized as they are portrayed to be in a lot

of your easily accessible media."

Christensen said the origins of the song date back a few years.

"I had most of the pieces

of it down quite a while ago and even had recorded parts of it," he said. "With the social climate the way it is right now, I thought it was an opportune time to finish it."

Christensen recorded the song — multiple instrument and vocal tracks — in his home studio, mixed and blended it using recording software and then pieced together a music video prior to posting it on YouTube.

"It's a solo project in every sense of the word," he said.

The video — and message the song conveys — has resonated with many.

"It got some nice traction right off the bat," he said. "People are really responding to it and offering positive feedback."

The song release comes on the heels of Christensen's 2017 album, "Digital Stimulation," the title track of

See BRIDGING on A3

Online...

Watch the music video for Jackson native Travis Christensen's new song, "The Great Divide," online at youtu.be/T-CvI8aPOBs.

Inside...

A new song warning against the dangers of outside influences on decision making has been censored by one of the world's largest information technology companies.



The Jackson City Council is exploring a possible partnership with Edina-based ZEF Energy that could result in the installation of an electric vehicle charging station in town.

City Council eyes electric vehicle charging station

Grant could pay for bulk of cost

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Is Jackson next in a line of Minnesota cities

to have an electric vehicle charging station?

Maybe, say members of the Jackson City Council, who last week agreed to sign on with ZEF Energy as an interested party as the Edina-based energy company applies for a

grant that could cover 80 percent of the cost of installing such a station in town.

ZEF Energy representatives Jim Goodman and Jim Losleben said electric vehicle charging stations

See ELECTRIC on A3

Preliminary tax levy bumps higher than state averages

Public hearings set next month

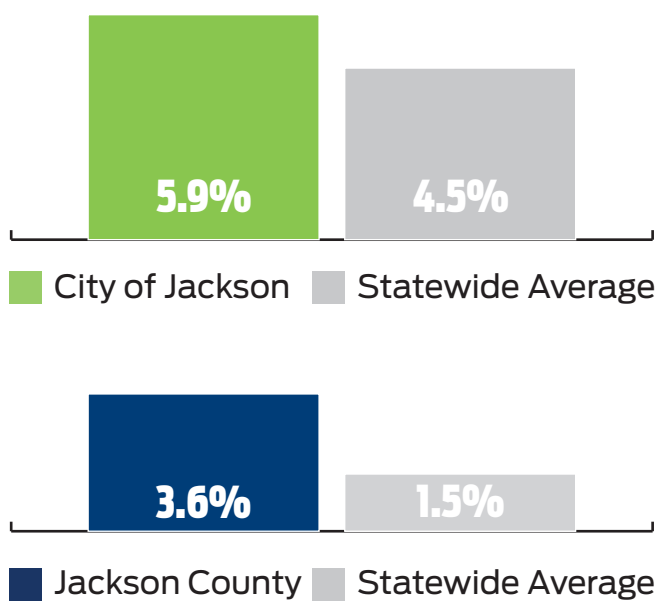
by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Preliminary 2021 property tax levy increases for the city and county of Jackson are higher than the averages for cities and counties across Minnesota.

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners has proposed a 3.6 percent property tax levy increase in 2021, higher than the 1.5 percent average statewide preliminary county increase, according to the Minnesota Department of Revenue. The Jackson City Council has pitched a property tax levy increase in 2021 of 5.9 percent, also

See LEVY on A3

Preliminary Property Tax Levy Increase



Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Local health care facilities prepared for patient spike

Still, providers urge residents to help slow spread

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Sanford Health facilities in Jackson County and beyond are ready for the expected surge of COVID-19 patients.

Even as reports of hospitals reaching capacity surface in state and national media outlets, Dawn Schnell, senior director of Sanford Jackson Medical Center, said the



Dawn Schnell

Sioux Falls, S.D.-based Sanford Health system remains fully capable of meeting the expected demand.

"There is no cause for alarm," Schnell said Monday. "We have been preparing for patient surges for months and are well equipped to manage the increase in demand. We are continually evaluating the readiness of our facilities, team and supplies. We also have capacity in our clinics and hospital to serve our patients. We are not full, and Sanford is still accepting our transfers."

That said, Schnell and her team of providers at Sanford Jackson encourage locals to take precautions to help slow the spread of

See PREPARED on A3

Inside...

B5 Jackson County notched 79 new lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 over the course of the last week, setting a one-week record for number of new cases for the second consecutive week.

JCC transitions to distance learning

Change comes as county caseload continues to rise

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Jackson County Central students will learn from home full time starting next week.

The change from a blended model of instruction, which had most students in school most days of the week, to full distance learning comes as the number of cases of COVID-19 in the county skyrockets and more and more JCC students and



Barry Schmidt

staff either test positive themselves or are in quarantine.

"We have quite a few staff members in quarantine and saw a large number of students within the last week have to do so as well," Barry Schmidt, superintendent of schools at JCC, said Monday.

As of this past Friday, 107 students and nine staff members were in quarantine; one student was positive for COVID-19. To date, 16 students and seven staff members have tested positive for the illness; 344 students and 41 staff members have had to quarantine.

Distance learning at JCC will be in effect until at least Dec. 11, but Schmidt said any return date is dependent upon caseload counts and trends

See JCC on A3

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Main Street art center goes retail

The Jackson Center for the Arts dabbles in retail this month and next as it hosts its annual holiday market.

The holiday market — offering for sale gift items from local artists and creators, including jewelry, weavings, pottery, stained glass, handcrafted soaps, furniture, photography and handcrafted wood items — runs during the months of November and December.

Hours are 2 to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

Businesses' best holiday gift ideas are featured in Livewire gift guides

The best in holiday gift ideas from local and area businesses are featured in the Livewire, Jackson County's largest circulation newspaper.

See the Sunday, Nov. 22, edition of the Livewire for the first Holiday Gift Guide of the season. Additional guides are scheduled to publish in the Livewire from now through Christmas.

The Livewire is mailed free of charge to more than 9,500 homes and businesses across six counties in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa. Extra copies of the Livewire are available for free pickup at the offices of Livewire Printing Co. in downtown Jackson. The Livewire may also be read for free online at jacksoncountypilot.com and livewireprinting.com.

Jackson bank teams up with 4-H program to offer holiday craft kits

A local bank is partnering with the Jackson County 4-H Program to offer holiday craft kits to local youngsters.

Beginning Nov. 30 and running through Dec. 5, parents and guardians can drive through the drive-through at Bank Midwest in Jackson and pick up two craft kits per child. The craft kits are designed for youth ages 3 to 11 years.

Darcy Reed Lusk, extension educator for 4-H youth development in Jackson County, said the holiday craft kits are being offered in lieu of the Santa's Workshop event, which typically takes place in person during Jackson's Holiday Fest celebration. The change is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We hope to host our Santa's Workshop next year at Riverside Elementary, where we can have our older 4-H members interact with participants," Reed Lusk said.

Business is outlet for raffle tickets

A Jackson business is the local outlet for P.E.O. Chapter CB Bakery Express raffle tickets.

The local P.E.O. Chapter is again offering a chance for six people to win the delivery of three-dozen homemade cookies, bars or other baked goods each month for a year through the Bakery Express raffle. Each raffle ticket represents one chance to win. Tickets may be purchased from any P.E.O. member or at State Farm Insurance in Jackson.

The drawing for the winners will take place Dec. 14. Delivery of baked goods will start in January 2021.

P.E.O. is a philanthropic educational organization committed to bringing to women of all ages an opportunity for higher education.

Prospective entrepreneurs invited to apply for '21 business challenge

Prospective entrepreneurs are encouraged to apply for the Jackson Business Challenge.

The challenge is a three-phase competition that seeks to attract new businesses to downtown Jackson by offering a prize package worth \$20,000. Applications for the 2021 Jackson Business Challenge will be accepted through Dec. 31.

The 2021 Jackson Business Challenge will follow the same guidelines as the 2019 and 2020 programs. The program aims to fill empty buildings in downtown Jackson and attract entrepreneurs to the community. The contest will consist of three rounds — business concept, detailed business plan and oral presentation.

Tom Nelson, Jackson's economic development coordinator, said the Jackson Business Challenge will look at the viability of applicants' business plans, as well as how they will enhance downtown. Entrepreneurs and current business owners in and out of Jackson are encouraged to apply to the program. Complete details and applications are available online at cityofjacksonmn.com/jbc.

PREPARED: For spike

Continued from A1

COVID-19, especially as cases spread rapidly and the holiday season approaches.

"We all want to be with our families during the holidays, and we want to celebrate with friends and neighbors," said Kevin Kimm, a family medicine provider at Sanford Jackson. "Unfortunately, this year is unlike any other, and with widespread community transmission of COVID-19 in our area, it's crucial that we take steps to keep our loved ones safe."

Locals are urged to wear masks in public areas and anytime social distancing isn't possible, wash hands frequently, stay 6 feet apart, get an annual flu shot and get tested for COVID-19 when needed.

"We need your help to keep our community safe and healthy," Kimm said. "Wearing a mask is

one of the most important things you can do right now; it's a simple act that shows you care about your friends, your family and your neighbors and want to do your part to keep them safe."

Schnell agreed. "For the health and well-being of our patients and communities, it's also important that we all remain diligent and focused on slowing the spread of COVID-19," Schnell said.

Schnell and Kimm encourage those who have been exposed to COVID-19 or who have symptoms, including a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, headache or excessive fatigue, congestion or a runny nose, to call Sanford Jackson.

JCC: Transitioning

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within the JCC community and the county as a whole.

"We all want our kids back, but we need healthy staff and healthy operations," he said. "We'd like to bring everybody back before Christmas. We feel it's important to get our students back as soon as possible."

When that does happen, though, Schmidt said he is unsure exactly what it will look like.

"When we return to school, we don't know what the model will be," he said. "We hope we can come back to where we

were."

JCC faculty and staff had this past Monday and Tuesday to plan for full distance learning ahead of the Thanksgiving break.

JCC Middle School Principal Chris Naumann said the district's foray into distance learning next week will look much different than it did this past spring.

"It's different planning than last year," he said. "There are more expectations than last year. I hope it goes well."

ELECTRIC: City eyes

Continued from A1

cost about \$93,500 to install. With grant funds covering around 80 percent of that, they said, cost to the city would be somewhere in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range.

"From there, we offer the option for the city to own the station," Goodman said. "It's a nice little amenity to have."

Electric vehicle charging stations ZEF Energy has helped install in recent years are netting around \$2,200 in annual revenue, Goodman said, projecting 20 percent year-over-year load growth. That said, he estimated a seven- to eight-year payback for the city on its contribution.

Losleben said the design life of an electric vehicle charging station is about 10 years.

"It's a winning situation," Losleben said of a partnership with ZEF Energy.

Council members Matt

Madden and Brandon Finck said they were interested in learning more about the possibilities associated with such a grant.

"I say we go forward to the next stage and stay in the mix," Finck said, adding he saw signing on as an interested party as an "education process with no commitment."

Madden agreed, saying the grant funds would make such a project attractive to consider.

"It's a good deal if we can make it work," he said.

The grant program is being administered through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency using funds secured as part of an emissions settlement with Volkswagen.

ZEF Energy has worked with a number of Minnesota cities on similar projects, including Alexandria, Willmar and Moorhead.

BRIDGING: New song

Continued from A1

which similarly bemoans the number of media outlets today telling people what to think and questions whether opinions are truly people's own or just the ones they are told to hold.

The former front man for Minneapolis-based band Tugboat Rampage, Christensen, a 2000 graduate of Jackson County Central High School, recently moved with his family to the Black Hills. Since

relocating, he has busied himself with solo studio work and is looking to form a band.

"I do look forward to a time when I can get back out and do some live shows," he said. "In the meantime, I'm staying busy, trying to create and make an impact through my art. That's all any of us who do this can ever hope to do."

Newly released song warning of outside influences on decision making censored

Jackson native Travis Christensen recently watched in disbelief as his new song warning against the dangers of outside influences on decision making was censored by one of the world's largest information technology companies.

Christensen released his new song, "The Great Divide," and music video on YouTube earlier this month, then decided to promote it a bit using Google Ads. Shortly thereafter, he was notified his ad campaign had been flagged and removed, as the content of his song and video were deemed "shocking."

Christensen said he has appealed the decision but has not heard back from Google.

"Without any explanation, Google said, 'No,' and then literally restricted and suppressed my message," Christensen said. "The only thing I can think of is that it is 'shocking' to tell people to think for themselves and do a little critical thinking here and there and stop making someone who has a different opinion than you your enemy."

LEVY: Hearings set

Continued from A1

higher than the 4.5 percent average statewide preliminary city increase.

In setting the preliminary levies back in September, both members of the Jackson County Board of Commissioners and the Jackson City Council, along with county and city staff, expressed a desire to trim the proposed increases down prior to adoption of final levy amounts next month.

"Historically, we've always come in lower than the preliminary levy," Jackson City Administrator Matt Skaret said. "I'm pretty confident we can come in lower than that 5.9 percent increase, as we typically have."

Exactly that happened last year, as the council approved a nearly identical preliminary levy increase of 5.9 percent before ending up signing off on a final levy amount more than \$45,600 less than that, just a 2.9 percent bump over the year prior. The story was the same with the county, with commissioners last year setting a preliminary levy of more than \$11.23 million — an increase of nearly \$528,000, or 4.9 percent, over the year prior — but trimming around \$373,000 off before approving the final levy, resulting in a year-over-year increase of less than 1.5 percent.

Members of the public will have the opportunity to weigh in on the county levy and 2021 county budget at a hearing set for 6 p.m. on Dec. 1 in the caf-

eteria room of the Jackson County Government Center. The city will accept public comment on its final levy and 2021 budget at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 15 at Jackson City Hall. Local governments must set their final 2020 property tax levies by Dec. 28.

While the city of Jackson has proposed a preliminary 2021 property tax levy increase higher than the statewide average, those of other local municipalities vary. The cities of Alpha and Okabena have proposed not increasing their levies one bit in 2021, while the city of Wilder has proposed an increase of 2 percent. On the other side of the coin, the city of Heron Lake has proposed a preliminary levy increase of 10 percent while the Lakefield City Council is eyeing a 10.5 percent hike.

As for the county, its preliminary tax levy increase for 2021 is among the highest of neighboring counties. Of those counties, only nearby Nobles County has set a higher preliminary tax levy increase — 4 percent. Cottonwood and Watonwan counties have set preliminary tax levy increases of 3 percent, with Murray at 3.2 percent and Martin at 3.3 percent.





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