



**Santa visits Ely... See /1B**

## Holiday Deadlines

**Dec. 25 issue... Dec. 21 at noon**

**Jan. 1 issue... Dec. 23 at noon**

**No paper published on Jan. 8**

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## CORONAVIRUS

# Cook is new COVID hotspot in North Country

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL - A reported surge last week in positive COVID-19 cases has Cook bucking state and countywide trends indicating that spread of the novel coronavirus has slightly slowed.

Data provided last Thursday

Reported cases surge 100 percent in three weeks

by the Minnesota Department of Health showed an increase of 25 cases in the Cook zip code from the Dec. 3 report, jumping from 91 to 116. In a three-week span from Nov. 19 to Dec. 10, Cook experienced a 100 percent increase in cumulative cases.



The impact was evident at Zup's Food Market in Cook,

where staff shortages related to COVID-19 exposures led to sharply reduced business hours for a week beginning Nov. 30. It's unclear when at least 11 reported cases at North Woods School coming out of the Thanksgiving break are account-

ed for in the weekly state data.

Cook is also in the upper tier of COVID case rates in St. Louis County when using the comparative calculation of cases per 10,000 people. At 517 cases per 10,000, Cook ranks 19th among the county's 50 zip codes. By comparison, Orr is

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## SEEDS OF HOPE



# From Cook to Chicago, with love

## Teacher uses music to heal trauma

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

COOK - Within adversity, seeds of hope and triumph can be found, brought to full bloom with the right measures of encouragement and love.

Cook native Trevor Nicholas knows this from both sides of the equation, as he has recently used his own experiences with adversity and triumph to inspire a unique creative endeavor that has brought comfort, healing, and community to the students of a large Chicago-area high school.

Trevor, a 2004 Cook High School graduate, is the choir director for a specialized four-year music program at Nicholas Senn High School on



Trevor Nicholas is from Cook.

the North Side of Chicago. Using an original composition he wrote, titled "Who Will Carry Me?" students and teachers in music and dance joined with alumni and guest artists last spring to individually record parts at a distance for a collaborative video that counters the trauma of a COVID-scarred year with comfort and hope.

What the thousands of people who have viewed the video don't know is that the seeds of this achievement were sown in the days of Trevor's youth in a tiny northern Minnesota town barely one-third the size of Senn High School.

Trevor first encountered adversity as a grade schooler when he developed rheumatoid arthritis, an affliction that

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## CRIME

# Employee charged in theft from Fortune Bay

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

TOWER - A Fortune Bay Resort Casino employee has been charged in federal court with stealing over \$300,000 from the Bois Forte Band operation over a six-year period.

Jennifer Lynn Boutto, 32, is alleged to have stolen \$315,739.87 in money, funds, and credits from June 2013 to October 2019, according to a complaint filed Monday in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis. U.S. Attorney Erica MacDonald, who filed the charging documents, provided no information

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## ISD 696

# Building project spikes property tax levy in Ely

by KEITH VANDERVORT  
Ely Editor

ELY - ISD 696 School Board members approved the 2021 property tax levy Monday night that shows a 32-percent increase over last year's levy. The 2021 levy of \$2,373,475 is an increase of \$576,411 over the 2020 levy of \$1,797,064.

District voters approved a \$10 million bond in August to help finance

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## MANUFACTURING

# Lampaa awarded U.S. patent for wood furnace

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

TOWER - A tiny father-son company that's operated for three generations in Tower has won a U.S. patent on a device that is completely transforming what

the world long believed about the burning of wood.

For generations, burning wood for heat has been associated with dirty emissions, that used to create environmental and public health impacts in many small and mid-sized cities where

Daryl and Herb Lampaa with their wood-burning stove. The manufacturing company is located in Tower. file photo

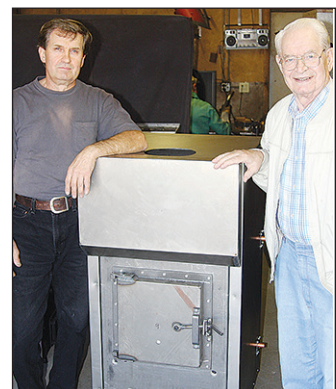
wood-burning was common.

That's why many cities began restricting the use of wood-burning devices by the 1990s and why the U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency eventually began to regulate soot emissions.

Those regulations culmi-

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## CITY OF ELY

## Ely council approves seven-percent hike in property tax levy

by KEITH VANDERVORT  
Ely Editor

ELY – City Council members here approved a seven-percent increase in the 2021 tax levy this week on the heels of a Truth in Taxation public hearing that failed to generate even one interested community member.

City staff explained the 2021 budget and levy proposal at the state-mandated public hearing on Dec. 8 and council members gave their final approval during their last meeting of the year on Tuesday night.

The approved city tax is \$1,892,300 for 2021, an increase of \$123,800 over 2020.

The Taxable Net Tax Capacity remains steady at \$1,496,148, compared to \$1,469,450 in 2020. “This is a very minimal change from last year,” said Clerk-Treasurer Harold Langowski.

The Estimated

Taxable Market Value for 2021 also remains steady at \$149,724,357, compared to \$149,464,152 in 2020. “From last year, we saw an actual increase, but again, it is minimal,” he said.

Tax scenarios provided by city staff from St. Louis County auditors showed tax hikes from 11 percent to as much as 24 percent on residential properties, and about 10 percent for commercial properties.

“For example, on a (residential) \$50,000 value, in 2021, the payable amount in 2020 was \$285.17 (including, city, county, school and special taxes), and in 2021, with our seven-percent increase in the levy, would equate to \$340.81, or a \$55.64 increase,” Langowski said. “And for the \$250,000 classification the 2020 payable tax was \$4,145.94, and payable 2021 is at \$4,558.83, or an increase of \$412.89 on residential.”

He also compared

commercial property rate increases. On a \$50,000 valuation property the tax increase is just over \$100 for 2021, and on a \$200,000 commercial valuation, the increase would be almost \$400.

“The increase in levied taxes is split between all tax classifications by St. Louis County,” Langowski said. “We can only assume that some of the bigger contributors are being assessed less of the levy and the rest of the classifications end up having to pay a higher percentage. If every parcel from 2020 paid the same portion of the levy in 2021, the percentage increase of the proposed tax would be seven percent across all the classifications. This is not the case. The county auditor sets the rates the classifications are taxed at. We can’t assume that we are collecting from fewer properties. I do not think many parcels were taken off the tax rolls in 2020.”

The \$123,800 increase

in the city property tax levy for 2021 shows an increase of \$70,000 (14.4 percent) in property tax for capital projects. The library fund also shows a city tax increase of \$45,700 (15.5 percent). Debt service is decreasing from \$315,100 to \$311,500.

Langowski highlighted a list of capital projects in the 2021 budget, totaling \$1,322,900. Property taxes collected of \$558,900 will help fund the projects. Federal and state grants of \$634,000 and street maintenance fees of \$130,000 also help pay for those projects. “We’re looking at reconstruction of West Chapman Street from Second Avenue to the water tower, West Shagawa Road and Washington Street, from the alley to Third Avenue East,” he said. “We have two grant applications in, one to St. Louis County Community Development Block Grant and another to Iron Range Resources and

Rehabilitation. Hopefully we get the funds to minimize the impact on property taxes.”

The public hearing on the city’s budget did stress the importance of state assistance in the form of Local Government Aid. Ely is likely to receive \$2,448,500 in 2021, an increase from \$2,364,000 in 2020. That additional \$84,500 is a 3.14-percent increase.

Coupled with another \$331,000 in state aid (Taconite and PERA) LGA makes up more than 75 percent of the city’s general fund revenue.

“(This) is the only way we continue to exist as we do,” said council member Heidi Omerza. “I can’t stress how important this is. I’m not concerned about the coming year. It is going to be in 2022 that we are going to need to be vigilant about LGA. That is something that we are going to have to keep on our radar. We, as a council

, must remain cognizant of that and not let that go.”

Prior to approving the 2021 city budget and adopting the final tax levy this week, the city’s Budget Committee met on Monday night to take one last look at the city’s finances. “We run a very tight ship with a small amount of employees, and there isn’t a lot of room for us to make changes,” council member Al Forsman said.

“To make changes comes down to cutting out projects. We wouldn’t be able to continue to service our city infrastructure the way we do,” he continued. “Other things that are affected by this budget, like health insurance and things like that, we really have no control over. As much as I would like to reduce this from the seven-percent (increase), it would not be fair to our city to do that.”

## CHARGES...Continued from page 1

about what position Boutto held at the casino or how the money was allegedly stolen. No additional details were available on the U.S. Attorney’s website.

Bois Forte Tribal

Chairwoman Cathy Chavers issued a terse one-line statement about the case.

“We have been in contact with the U.S. Attorney’s office and are aware of the proceedings

and will comment once this matter is concluded,” said Chavers.

The charge of embezzlement and theft from an Indian tribal organization carries a maximum sentence of five years

imprisonment and/or an unspecified fine, according to Title 18 of the U.S. Code.

A related section of federal law describes a specific crime of theft by officers or employees of

gaming establishments on Indian lands, which carries a maximum \$1 million fine and up to 20 years in prison, but Boutto was charged only with the lesser offense. Multiple calls by the *Timberjay* to

the U.S. Attorney’s media number asking for clarification about the charging decision were not returned by press time.

## HOPE...Continued from page 1

left him in a wheelchair for a short time and set the stage for him to turn his interests from sports to music. He credits his school music teacher, Bailey Conger, and piano teacher Carol Johnston for nurturing his development and setting examples that he incorporates into his own teaching.

“I started piano lessons, actually, with Bailey Conger for two years, right when I was very young, and then I transferred over to Carol Johnston,” Trevor said. “To be able to teach K through 12 is such an incredibly demanding job that pulls you in so many different ways, and I watched (Conger) just work tirelessly for her students over all those years. She was my music teacher for 13 years.”

Johnston’s influence went well beyond keyboard skills, as she encouraged Trevor’s interest in creating original compositions.

“Carol is just one of the kindest, most caring people I’ve ever met,” Trevor said. “To have that as a model was incredible and continues to impact me as I work with my students.”

Trevor became more active as he moved into high school and his arthritis was brought under control, but playing and creating music remained essential. And he discovered his playing was therapeutic not only for himself but for others. After graduating in 2004, he headed off to North Park University in Chicago with the idea that, maybe, he could use his music professionally to help others.

It wasn’t long after Trevor left town that he would encounter a very different type of adversity through tragic events that shook the Cook community to its core.

Just months after graduating together, Trevor’s

classmate Patrick Wilenius died in a car accident. Just seven months later, in July 2005, another horrific car accident claimed the lives of classmates Lindi Fogelberg and Dan Swanson, Lindi’s mother, Nancy, and Swanson’s girlfriend, Paige Bergman, a 2005 Cook graduate.

“It was like the heart was kind of ripped out of our class,” Trevor said.

The collective community pain of those losses was still there in 2007 when Megan Anderson, a graduate with the Cook class of 2005, was slain while at work in Eveleth.

Trevor’s voice still chokes up when he talks about losing his friends and classmates, but the friendships and the tragedy have made him better able to handle the challenges he’s faced teaching students who often experience equally traumatic events.

He recalled the night when Lindi was honored for eclipsing 2,000 points in basketball. Lindi was a local star, while Trevor wasn’t part of the “in crowd.” On her way out of the building she stopped, turned to Trevor, and invited him to come over to her house to celebrate.

“It struck me in the gut,” Trevor said. “She’s in the midst of the biggest achievement of her life so far, and she’s inviting others into it that haven’t been considered being ‘in.’ before. That’s cool. And then she passed away. But that’s always stuck with me, to invite others in.”

When Trevor graduated from North Park with a music education degree in 2008, his mentor, Dr. Rollo Dilworth, helped him land a job teaching elementary music, choir and orchestra in Skokie, Ill., filling in for teachers who were on leave. A librarian tipped him off to a job in the Chicago Public Schools system at Prosser Career Academy High School, “and I followed that lead

and ended up teaching in high school and elementary school, a split position.”

It was a rough start.

“I didn’t even have a piano, a computer, or speakers,” Trevor said. “I only had three out of 151 students that even knew they were going to be in choir.”

He got the equipment in part thanks to a \$15,000 grant to partner with Barbara Davis and the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic to take students on a unique musical exploration of the “great migration” of African-Americans to the Chicago area.

And out of that project came one of Trevor’s first projects that addressed the trauma some of his students encountered, a rap called “Forced to Listen.”

“The girl who was kind of the head of writing the lyrics to the rap had lost her best friend, who she called her brother, to gun violence,” Trevor said. “Now two years ago, she lost her boyfriend to gun violence.”

Trevor managed to transition into teaching just high schoolers, but he only had them as students for a year, not enough time to build either the trust or skills he wanted for his students in his work, and after four years, he just walked away.

“I had a mentor come and watch me teach and she pulled me aside and she said, ‘I think your time here is done,’” Trevor said. “You have such a heart to give through this occupation, but you need to be able to give freely and have people in front of you who are willing to receive and work with you freely.”

Trevor didn’t know where he would go next, but late that summer while in Sweden with his wife, Renee, he got a call from a principal at Senn. They had a position and they wanted to interview him. He went to a friend’s house there to do a long-distance

interview via Skype. He got the job.

“I knew I’d be walking into hard stories again, and I was ready for that,” Trevor said. “I didn’t realize that the whole music team had turned over that summer and the students were bitter and hurt. Their music teachers had left and betrayed them, and there were some really hurt students who didn’t want to trust me.”

But, while conducting a 51-voice choir that had to cram into a small history classroom with desks for rehearsals, Trevor began to build that trust, and also to raise money for materials and renovations. After four years he’d built an award-winning choral program, a new dedicated practice room was a reality, and he was on the way toward raising about \$250,000. Somewhat accustomed by now to the ups and downs and trials and tribulations of life in a diverse school where three-fourths of the students were socially and economically disadvantaged, Trevor looked forward to getting the 2019-20 school year off to a good start. His hopes were dashed before the year began.

“One of our theater teachers in this four-year program was arrested for extreme sexual abuse of a student in the program,” Trevor said. “Two weeks later, one of our students committed suicide. Then we went through a historic two-week teacher strike. Then one of our junior student’s brothers died suddenly in a car accident. And then one of our PE teachers was let go for some racist remarks to some students and a student protest happened.”

Trevor was working on a master’s degree, and his project topic, “Responding to Trauma Through Vocal Music Composition,” was more timely and needed than he

anticipated. Throughout the fall and into the spring he wrote various short pieces for his choirs to sing in warm-ups that had inspirational lyrics and uplifting melodies and harmonies – You’re Enough, Don’t Look Down, Stormy Roots, The Cave.

But when the COVID-10 pandemic hit and Chicago Public Schools shut down classes and switched to distance learning, “Who Will Carry Me?” came to the fore for Trevor. He saw the effects of social isolation on students attuned to performing as one. He heard and felt the intense stories of students and families affected by the virus, including one student who lost his brother, mother, and father to COVID-19 in the span of just a few days.

“It was obvious from the start that it was going to hit black and brown communities harder,” Trevor said. “I said to my student teacher that we’re going to have opportunities to respond. And I knew, based on the things that I experienced growing up in my hometown, and then in college, that we could either sit in a place of ‘oh, my goodness, this is all happening’ or we could immediately start looking for ways to make a difference.”

As Trevor looked at how “Who Will Carry Me?” could factor in, the idea of creating a virtual performance not only excited his students but lit the fire to bring more people into the project. All Senn Arts divisions were invited to participate in some way, and a dance choreographed for the song became integral to the project.

“It ended up, we invited everybody in,” Trevor said, echoing a lesson he learned many, many years before.

The project exceeded everyone’s expectations, including Trevor’s.

“By the time we had created this, this giant hug of a project for ourselves, it really stood up to the litmus test of a professional piece of art that could stand next to anything else that we saw,” he said. “At that point, there weren’t any projects like it that had both dancers, singers and musicians all virtually combined.”

But the most important goal, bringing together and affirming his students in one of the most difficult and trying times of their lives, was achieved as well.

One of Trevor’s students, Mia Mendoza, a vocalist and recipient of a Chicago Rising Star music award, expressed a common sentiment in the October edition of the Senn Music Journal: “I couldn’t describe the feeling of satisfaction it brings,” she wrote. “It was shocking to me to see how many people had participated, and quite frankly, the song was straight heat. One of (Trevor’s) unique ideas, as one may say, has proven to strengthen our community and make artists and our peers feel the unity we felt in person. I have never been happier to be a part of something so great.”

The video has garnered widespread attention on YouTube and Facebook, as well as among professional artists and state politicians. While Trevor enjoys reporting the latest number of views to his students, he’s also excited about their collaborative effort in leading to more opportunities for building community and touching others in the Senn community through music, including his compositions.

And to think that it all began in Cook.

You can view “Who Will Carry Me” online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpBZeEo-C2io&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpBZeEo-C2io&feature=emb_logo).