



HUSKIES SPLIT SOFTBALL OPENER

The Jackson County Central softball team split a season-opening doubleheader against Martin County West on Saturday.
Story, B1



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

A silt berm — what some lakeshore property owners are calling an “island of sludge” — forms at the outlet of Judicial Ditch 8 in the northwest bay of Loon Lake. As questions swirl about who is responsible for the buildup, the problem only gets worse.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC County still tabbed as a ‘hotspot’

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Jackson County remains a COVID-19 hotspot, and likely will for the next few weeks.

That’s the word from Mayo Clinic, which labeled the county as a “hotspot” for COVID-19 late last month based on its rolling average of daily cases over the week prior — a measure the Rochester-based health care system states is the “best sign of hotspots.”

On March 28, Jackson County’s average daily case count per 100,000 people was 61, the highest in the state. One week later, that figure was 93, still the highest in the state. This past Sunday, the county’s average daily case count per 100,000 people was 91, second only to Lake of the Woods County’s 93.

And Mayo Clinic doesn’t predict it’s going to get much better in Jackson County over the next two weeks either. In fact, Mayo forecasts average daily case counts per 100,000 ranging between 91 and 100 through April 25, with the average daily case

See **HOTSPOT** on **A3**

QUESTIONS SWIRL AS LOON LAKE FILLS

There’s an issue, but no one’s sure who’s to blame, who should fix it

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Jackson County’s Loon Lake is filling up with silt, and it’s unclear who is responsible — either for why it’s happening or for fixing it.

The culprit appears to be Judicial Ditch 8, a sprawling network of open ditch and underground tile that drains more than 8,000 acres of land in south-central Jackson County. The ditch system outlets into Loon Lake, flowing in from the northwest. It’s precisely there where silt flows have built up over the last few years to the point there is more land in that portion of the lake than water.

In high-water years, lake levels in the northwest bay may be measured in inches; in low-water years, the bay is basically devoid of water, save for thin channels of water flowing around each side of the massive sediment berm.

See **LOON LAKE** on **A3**



2017



2019

‘THIS IS THE COUNTY’S TOP LAKE IN TERMS OF RECREATION AND CAMPING AND SWIMMING, AND IT’S JUST FILLING UP WITH SILT.’

Brad Sievert

Was ditch cleaning to blame?

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Landowners — both of shoreline property on Loon Lake and of farmland within the Judicial Ditch 8 system — have alleged the county’s 2017 and 2018 “cleaning” of the ditch is to blame for the rapid and significant accumulation of silt in Loon Lake.

County officials disagree.

“I will not agree the cleanout caused the silt,” Jackson County Engineer Tim Stahl said.

The county is charged with maintenance of the local ditch system. Occasionally, maintenance includes what is known as “cleaning,” either as a matter of routine or at the request of landowners within the ditch system.

Stahl said a ditch cleaning involves the removal of accumulated sediment from the bottom of the ditch.

“We don’t dig the ditch deeper,” he said. “We dig it back to its original depth. And we do not widen the ditch. We don’t ever scrape

See **CLEANING** on **A3**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

“Sluffing” of the steep sides of Judicial Ditch 8 is likely the cause of at least some of the silt buildup in Loon Lake, though it’s unclear if a 2017-2018 “cleaning” of the ditch exacerbated the problem.

Inside...



The problem in Loon Lake may even be too big for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to handle on its own.

Online...



See aerial video footage of the Judicial Ditch 8 system and its outlet into Loon Lake online at youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYioJWrxOYTWQX7MGJkspRkME3-t001-9.

Local vaccination rate inches higher

Nearly 45 percent of eligible Jackson County residents have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

As of this past Sunday, 3,466 locals — 43.2 percent of the county’s population of those 16 years of age and older — had received at least one vaccination dose, up 159 from the week prior. Of those 3,466, 2,381 — 29.7 percent of the county’s population of those 16 years of age and older — have received the number of shots required for maximum efficacy, what the Minnesota Department of Health terms a “completed vaccine series.”

In terms of the county’s population as a whole, nearly 35 percent have received at least one dose, while just short of 24 percent have received a completed vaccine series. More than 71 percent of locals 65 years of age or older have received at least one dose; nearly 66 percent have received a completed vaccine series.

Jackson, Windom city officials in the running for administrator job

Interviews set for Tuesday, April 27

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

Jackson’s economic development coordinator and Windom’s city administrator are among the finalists for the position of Jackson County administrator.



Tom Nelson

Tom Nelson, a Jackson-

based community and business development specialist with Chatfield-based Community and Economic Development Associates, and Steve Nasby, who has been with the city of Windom for the last 15 years, will be interviewed by the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, along with three other candidates, for the position of county administrator at a special meeting on April 27. Other candidates include Hector City Administrator Andrea Aukrust, former Nicollet County Administrator Ryan Krosch

former Mille Lacs County Administrator Pat Oman. Aukrust has been city administrator in Hector for nearly three years. Prior to that she ran a rental supply business in Sleepy Eye. She has also served as the coordinator of the Faribault, Martin and Jackson Multi-County Adult Substance Abuse and Family Dependency Treatment Courts. She holds bachelor’s degrees in sociology and marketing and a master’s degree in urban planning. Krosch served as administrator in Nicollet

See **ADMINISTRATOR** on **A3**

Local FFA members gear up for virtual state convention

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Members of the Jackson County Central FFA Chapter are gearing up for a state convention unlike any other in history.

Beginning Monday and continuing over the course of the next 10 days, dozens of members of the JCC FFA Chapter will compete in career and leadership development event contests, receive the prestigious state degree and be honored among others across the state for excellence in FFA — all virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter advisor Laura Bidne said while a virtual state convention will

See **FFA** on **A2**

Mackenzie Henning is in the running to be named the Minnesota FFA’s star in agribusiness during next week’s convention.



