

# New plans underway for Liberty Beach

by T.A. LeBrun

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Liberty Beach, located on 5454 Waterway Road on the east side of Mille Lacs Lake, will soon start to see more action, as a new business venture by local entrepreneurs, Mike and Margie Christensen, is underway.

The business, "Good Life at Liberty Beach," will consist of a campground. Margie Christensen said the entire lot will be turned into the campground consisting of eight RV with full hook up campsites. As per shoreland ordinance, that is all the site will allow. The campsites will be seasonal, and ice fishing will continue to operate in the winter by Christensens and Dick Gadbois (a.k.a. Dickie) from the site. The Christensens also operate out of the Isle Bay.

"Campsites are always in demand around the area,"



PHOTO BY T.A. LEBRUN

## Campsites coming to Liberty Beach

Owners of Liberty Beach, Mike and Margie Christensen, are making plans to implement RV campsites at Liberty Beach, with the expected date of this summer.

said Christensen. She added the goal is to open in the spring.

As for the restaurant, it will remain closed. Christensen said it wasn't profitable and had been returned to them on contract for deed. The Christensens had owned the restaurant

since 2013. "We closed the restaurant in 2014 shortly after the DNR put the poor regulations into place. If they ever let us keep fish in the summer, I am sure the area would do much better, and our business up there may have stood a chance," said Margie Christensen.

"We ran it as a restaurant initially but then leased it out to various people, sold it a couple years ago on a contract for deed, but they defaulted and we got it back," she said. "We didn't want to go back to a restaurant so have decided to go this path."

Christensen said they are looking forward to continuing to draw business to the area. "We feel that seasonal renters add a lot to the neighborhood and bring their business to the community," she added.

The Christensens also own Hunter Winfield's Resort in Isle. Margie said that the resort will continue to operate as is and will manage the contracts for the campground.

For more information, call Hunter Winfield's Resort at 320-676-1100 or visit: <http://www.hunterwinfields.com/>.

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## Sign response

the United States. Congressional Resolutions in 1893 and 1898 described the area as the "former Mille Lacs Reservation."

The Band asserts that there was no Congressional intent to dissolve the 1855 Treaty Reservation thus nullifying the agreement. This was backed by the 2015 opinion issued by the U.S. Department of the Interior Solicitor, Hilary C. Tompkins.

There Tompkins stated that "A series of interactions fraught with hidden agendas, arbitrary shifts in policy, utter confusion, and broken commitments" occurred and "On several occasions, the United States was aware of the unauthorized encroachments within the Band's Reservation, but due to external economic and settlement pressures, the government failed to maintain a consistent and clear position on the status of the Band's lands, leading to a gradual, ad hoc opening of the reservation to settlement and development without the requisite, clear Congressional intent to change the boundaries of the Band's Reservation."

Almost two million dollars of tax-payer money has been spent defending the lawsuit filed against the County by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to settle the boundary issue.

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has stated they simply want to place signs up to mark the boundaries of the original Reservation, but it's uncertain what the implications would be should the Reservation go back to the hands of the Band. MnDOT recently stated that it "does not anticipate major changes at this time" and looks forward to working collaboratively with Mille Lacs County and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.

Since Walz and Ellison

have reversed the State's opinion, permitting has been shifted from local authorities to the federal government and the County's interest has been ignored by the Governor with attention solely given to the Band. It is uncertain what policing would look like if the Reservation status is granted back to the Band.

The office of the Mille Lacs County Administrator released the following statement concerning the Minnesota Department of Transportation placement of highway 1855 Reservation boundary signs:

"For more than 100 years, it has been settled law – accepted by the County, the State, the Federal government, and even the Band itself – that the Mille Lacs Reservation was disestablished. Now that the Band has sought to re-open that question, it will be decided by the federal courts and not by the Minnesota Department of Transportation's placement of highway signs."

The MnDOT Office of Tribal Affairs & Office of Chief Counsel, in a letter titled "Clarification on the Mille Lacs Reservation Boundary," stated: "The Attorney General has clarified the State of Minnesota's position on the Mille Lacs Reservation boundary. The Governor agrees with the Attorney General's analysis. The State's position on the boundaries of the Mille Lacs Reservation is consistent with the position of the federal government. MnDOT will continue to act in accordance with the directions of the Governor's Office and Attorney General's Office and will utilize the same boundary the federal government utilizes for the Mille Lacs Reservation."

The boundary issue is currently in U.S. District Court and will likely be resolved by the U.S. Supreme Court in the near future.

# Wahkon City Council starts new year, reorganizes

by Evan Orbeck

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The Wahkon City Council convened for their regular monthly meeting on Monday, Jan. 11, with a brief agenda primarily concerned with swearing in a newly elected and other annual reorganizational procedures. The council also addressed several requests from organizations they've previously donated to. However, the council chose to hold off on donations until they had a better grasp on what was in their charitable gambling fund, as a payment was also needed for Isle Fire Department.

## Annual reorganization

The council began by swearing in its newly elected member, Brenda Buck, who was led through her oath of office by city clerk Karrie Roeschlein.

After this oath, the council appointed their acting mayor, councilor Tony Button, along with a slew of other appointments, including: weed inspector, Mayor Ronda Blornson; Assistant Weed Inspector, maintenance supervisor

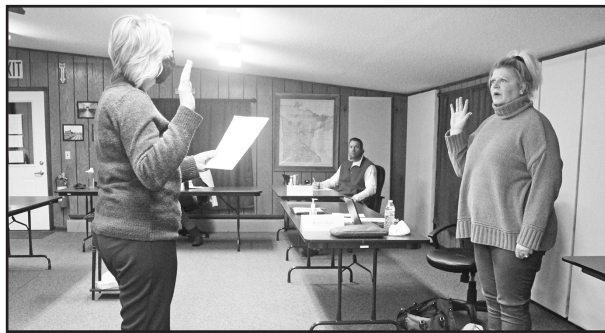


PHOTO BY EVAN ORBECK

## Oath of office

City clerk leads new councilor Brenda Buck through her oath of office on Jan. 11 in Wahkon.

Jake Weinreich; wastewater commissioner, councilor Chip Frederickson; streets and sidewalks commissioner, Button; municipal buildings commissioner, Buck; and parks commissioner, councilor Rick Roberts.

First National Bank of Milaca - Isle branch was designated the official depository, and the League of Minnesota Cities 4M Fund was designated for their municipal money market fund, the Mille Lacs Messenger, the official newspaper, Hoffman, Phillip, and Martell PLLC was designated the City's accountants, Kennedy and Graven their attorneys, Rinke

Noonan as special legal counsel and Short Elliot Hendrickson as engineers. Zoning administrator was Sourcewell, David Drown Associates, Inc., was financial advisor, and Oberfeld Insurance was insurance provider.

## Donation requests

Among their new business items, the council reviewed a request for donations from the Initiative Foundation. Roeschlein told the council that though they previously donated to the foundation, they have recently held off on giving the donation because their charitable gambling fund was now going to pay for services through the Isle

Fire Department. When asked by Buck, Roeschlein explained that the Initiative fund was a philanthropic organization based in Little Falls, whose work helped provide childcare and other community resources. The City of Wahkon has previously done training for their Wahkon Area Vision Effusion committee through the Foundation.

Another proposed donation on the docket would go to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans. Roeschlein noted that the City had given a large donation last year, at \$250, and Button said around \$400 went to the Initiative Foundation.

The charitable gambling fund currently had \$8,800. In April, the City would need to make a quarterly payment of \$9,375 to the fire department. To be sure there was enough to pay the department, Bjornson suggested the council see how much money was in the fund at the next monthly meeting. The council was in agreement to wait on committing to any donations until next month.

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## Rescue

David Christofferson.

Christofferson's neighbor to the east, John Mcardle, was there also investigating the explosion. It appeared the explosion came from the east side of the trailer and sent debris, along with the structure and content of the

trailer home to the west several feet. The roof had also collapsed on the east side of the trailer.

A fire was beginning where the explosion appeared to come from, and the pair was concerned about the occupant.

"I was worried the roof would collapse on him," said Mcardle.

They saw Christofferson laying by debris inside his home near a window. Miklesh and Mcardle knew they needed to act quickly to remove him.

They tried to pull Christofferson up out of the window. He was responsive but seemed dazed, and it appeared his leg was caught on something. The pair con-

tinued to remove Christofferson from the trailer, using a nearby ladder, but were unsuccessful.

Law enforcement, Isle police and a Mille Lacs County Sheriff's deputy, arrived just as the fire had gained momentum and had become quite large, noted Mcardle.

A sheriff's deputy, Brett Erickson, was able to dis-

lodge Christofferson's foot from the debris it was caught on and lift the man up to the window. Isle Police Officer Alex Skluzacek, along with the help of the two bystanders, guided him down the ladder to safety.

Christofferson was taken to the hospital with minor injuries. It is suspected that the explosion was caused by

an improperly working gas furnace.

Of the heroic rescue, Mille Lacs County acting Chief Deputy Kyle Burton said, "There was definitely an urgency to the situation, and with the fire and the initial explosion, there was the possibility for a secondary explosion."

With story ideas or news tips, email:

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