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Jorg Achermann and his mother, Delaine, shown here at their rural Leader home Friday, July 23, reflect on the day Peter Achermann, Jorg's father and Delaine's husband, disappeared. He was on a shopping trip in Staples for groceries and medicine for his wife on July 24, 2009. He never returned home that night. His abandoned car was found the next day.

VIDEO
For video, see brainerddispatch.com

STILL MISSING

Questions remain in Peter Achermann's 2009 disappearance

By Jennifer Kraus
Staff Writer

Leader

When 16-year-old Delaine Voigt met Peter Achermann, it was love at first sight.

She knew right then and there she was going to marry him, and she did on April 13, 1953. They had 11 children over time and the family eventually settled in the 1960s on a remote 540-acre farm in Leader. Today, the family property consists of about 200 acres.

Delaine and Peter spent 56 loving years together — and should have celebrated 12 more anniversaries, but those years were stolen from the couple. The last time Delaine saw Peter was July 24, 2009. On that day, he disappeared and

MISSING: Page A11



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Peter Achermann poses in his mother's garden in Switzerland. Achermann went back to Switzerland the first time when he was 33 to see his aging father who was 77 at the time, as his health was frail. According to Achermann's memoir, his father told him he was relieved to see him before he died. Achermann said his visit gave his father a burst of life.

Allocating new resources for housing needs

Crow Wing County to hire 2 in community services

By Chelsey Perkins
Community Editor

After sheltering hundreds of homeless individuals and families for almost 13,000 collective nights during the pandemic, Crow Wing County is set to expand its efforts to address area housing issues.

The county board Tuesday, July 27, agreed 4-1 to approve the addition of one social worker and one case aide within Crow Wing County Community Services. Salaries for these positions will be fully funded

by a grant awarded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services through the Community Living Infrastructure Grant Program.

The program provides counties and tribal governments the opportunity to develop more direct involvement programming surrounding housing. Crow Wing County received \$341,715 for fiscal years 2022-23. The social worker position set to be added to the staff will be a housing resource specialist and

HOUSING: Page A14

Rescuers arrest 2 people who climbed into hot pipeline

Two protesters who climbed into an Enbridge pipeline at the Willow River crossing in Aitkin County — and who endured temperatures near 130 degrees with reduced oxygen — were rescued and taken into custody.

In a news release, Aitkin County Sheriff Dan Guida said the two individuals had climbed inside the east end of the pipe Sunday, July 25. The pipe itself was capped at one end, which created a trapped air environment

for the two people who had climbed inside. The trapped air inside the pipe was estimated to be near 130 degrees with reduced oxygen concentration.

A firefighter, wearing a self-contained breathing apparatus and harness, entered the pipe to attempt to remove the two people. The self-contained breathing apparatus allowed for 30 minutes of air in the tank, Guida said. The firefighter reached

ARREST: Page A14

CDC recommends masking back up

Advice applies where virus is spreading

By David Shepardson and Julie Steenhuisen

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Reuters) — Americans fully vaccinated against COVID-19 should go back to wearing masks in indoor public places in regions where the coronavirus and especially the delta variant are spreading rapidly, U.S. authorities said on Tuesday, July 27.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommended all students and

MASKS: Page A13



Andrew Kelly / Reuters

People wear masks as they pass through a pedestrian subway as cases of the infectious coronavirus delta variant continue to rise in New York City on Monday, July 26.

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From Page A1



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Peter and Delaine Achermann sit on a bench in 2000 in Switzerland, Peter's home.

They also called the sheriff's department. "I was very worried," Delaine said. "I was tying a rug and I tied it in no time because, where was he? I kept looking down the road to see if he was coming. It was a nice, sunny day.

"I called my son and I said, 'What did you and your dad do?' and he said, 'We had coffee at the El Ray in Motley and then he went on his way.'"

Delaine said Peter had a sound mind and was healthy, even though he used a walking cane; and the car was running fine. Surveillance cameras at Ernie's in Staples showed Peter appeared fine as he picked up groceries.

"I called hospitals all over to see if there had been an accident or whatever," Delaine said the day Peter went missing. Jorg and his brother drove around all night into the morning to see if they could see any signs of Peter and his car.

Peter's abandoned vehicle, described as a light blue 1995 Chevrolet Caprice Wagon, was located in a mud hole off Cass County Road 32, as though it was stuck, at the end of a minimum maintenance road the next morning. The groceries and medication Peter purchased were still in the vehicle. However, there were no signs of Peter, his walking cane or his keys.

"They called Jorg to come look at the car," Delaine said. "But we were like, 'Why would he go there?' Peter would go through town and would probably want to go home and be done with it. He was on a mission."

"They gave me a call and told me directions on how to get there," Jorg said. "I was never on that low maintenance road — there ain't much in that area. The terrain out there was rough, it was thick brush and the deer flies were horrible. There were no signs of him there.

"We feel that he was physically never there and that someone just dumped the car there."

Some wondered if Peter stopped to write the speech he was preparing for his granddaughter's wedding. However, Delaine said he had that mostly written and if he would have stopped to touch it up, he wouldn't have driven to the spot where his vehicle was found.

Delaine said if he got stuck on the road where the vehicle was found, "The first thing he would have done was put the pedal to the floor, and mud would have flown all over because he would have been pretty disgusted. Then he would have gotten out of the car and I can just see him doing that and getting his cigar out, unwrapping it ... then pulling out his match to light the cigar and taking a few puffs. I can see him doing this over and over, but there was no sign of this whatsoever."

Jorg added the keys were not in the car and his dad always left his keys in the vehicle. He also said his dad had no enemies.

"There's always people you don't agree with or who don't agree with you or whatever, but there was nobody that I know of that wished any harm upon him," he said, adding when the family had a benefit for Peter when he disappeared, hundreds of people showed up to offer their support.

Peter also had very little money on him, only about \$30 in his wallet, along with his driver's license and his green card — which all are missing. These items were never found, even after extensive searches for over a month, which included up to 50 cadaver dogs, the Minnesota National Guard and other agencies assisting the Cass County Sheriff's Office in the search.

"We searched those woods and we were finding business cards and everything else from the search, but nothing from Dad," Jorg said.

The family said if Peter would have had a stroke or other medical emergency his body would have been

found. Delaine feels Peter stopped to help someone on the bridge and "things got out of hand," she said. "Many times he would stop to help someone. He would help anyone and if they needed money, he would give it to them."

"It's hard because we don't know," Jorg said. "You let your imagination run wild and our thoughts can be of pretty scary places."

Twelve years later and the family still has no answers to what happened to Peter. The family said it has started to be a routine knowing Peter is not around. They stay busy doing chores around the farm and the children go to work — all while thoughts of Peter and what happened to him are always on their minds.

"We have no choice," they said of accepting Peter is gone. "We all got the raw deal on that one, but you have to accept it."

The investigation

Cass County Sheriff Tom Burch said the case of Achermann's disappearance is still active, but as many years have passed he's afraid they're getting further away from trying to find out what happened to him.

"It's strange," Burch said, as his department has followed many leads over the years but still haven't found any trace of Achermann or his belongings. "This case remains open and we're trying to figure out what happened to him. We want to bring comfort to the family and give them closure and answers on what happened to him."

Burch said the family is close-knit and always extremely helpful with the investigation.

"You know there are rumors that fly and ... (people) who sit back and tell you what really happened, you know, but nothing ever made sense," Burch said. "You just don't disappear into thin air."

Burch said there was the initial theory of Achermann having a medical issue, but that didn't add up — they would have found him because of his age and limited abilities while using a cane. "He wouldn't have tracked off in that area because you would have to be in very good shape," Burch said, as it was rough terrain where the vehicle was found, about 5 miles northeast of Staples. "There was never an explanation to what he was doing up that road because it was a minimum maintenance road."

Burch said Achermann was known in the area and knew a lot of the roads, but being on that road doesn't make sense. Burch said somebody

has to know something about what happened to Achermann that day. He pleaded with people to call the sheriff's office with any information about that day or about Achermann that could lead to finding answers.

"Please tell us if you know anything so we can offer closure for the family," Burch said. "Somebody had to see him driving around that day or seen the vehicle go towards that road. Even if someone knows something that they don't think is a big deal or important, please call us as it might help the investigation."

A reward of up to \$20,000 for information is still posted for any information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the people responsible for his disappearance, if that disappearance is determined to be the result of foul play.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Cass County Sheriff's Office at 800-450-2677. People also may send a tip to Crime Stoppers of Minnesota by calling 800-222-8477 or going online at crimestoppersmn.org.

Peter Achermann's life

Achermann was born on May 21, 1927, to Heinrich and Berta Achermann in Neuhausen am Rheinfall, Switzerland, and raised by middle class parents in the Roman Catholic faith, according to "The Journey of a Lifetime," Peter's memoir that was written by his niece Becky (Rebecca) Achermann. His niece wrote the 329-page memoir from Peter's journals written in German. Peter's brother translated the journal to Becky.

Peter, the second oldest of four children, was baptized, confirmed and served as an altar boy at the Holy Cross Catholic Church in Neuhausen, Switzerland. As a child, Peter already knew he wanted to be a farmer. He left his home at age 16 and spent three years at different farms in different parts of Switzerland. At age 19, he completed his military obligation and received his passport and visa to go to France to work. At this time, "the ravages of World War II were apparent — economic poverty and psychological uncertainties lead to political unrest," Peter wrote. Peter made up his mind to travel to America as "political troubles were brewing" and the "townspeople respected the communist organizations that were active against German laborers."

Peter got on the SS Washington, a liberty ship, in Le Havre, France, set to land on

the shores of New York the morning of Dec. 23, 1948. People on the ship were displaced people from the eastern countries of Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — and were predominantly Jewish people. While on the ship, he observed people's emotions, full of appreciation to be able to witness many immigrants embracing the promised land and a better future.

"I didn't have to leave Switzerland," Peter wrote in his memoir. "I felt positive and was full of expectations without any reservations, exceptions or restrictions."

Peter worked a succession of jobs as a hired hand in the commercial farming industry and eventually moved to Osakis. He worked on a farm in Belle River and Millerville. It was in Osakis where his neighbors taught Peter how to accept help and how to do good to others. He wrote that the biggest lesson of his life in America was, "Do unto others as you would like to be done unto you."

It was this rural Minnesota town where he met Delaine. They married on Easter Monday on April 13, 1953, at St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Belle River. And as their married life began, they purchased property in Millerville to farm. Peter also started working on a pipeline being built from Minnesota to North Dakota.

The Achermanns had 11 children — John, Mike, Denise (who died in a car crash in Montana), Josef (who died of alcoholism), Vanessa, Michelle, Franz, twins Desiree and Peter (Peter died from crib syndrome), Renee and Jorg.

In one of the last pages of Achermann's memoir, he writes about his death and funeral wishes.

"Quite often I entertain thoughts about dying," he wrote. "Now that I am old and worn out I hope to experience a peaceful death at home."

"My hope is that in dying I will be able to have my family around me and that for my loved ones it will be a positive experience."

"I would also like to plan my funeral ... without spending a lot of money. ... My hope is that the main feelings or beliefs of all should be of thankfulness for the good years, forgiveness of past weaknesses and the knowledge of eternal life."

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