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TOWER

Police contract talks with Breitung on hold

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
 Managing Editor

TOWER — After lengthy discussion, the city council here, on Monday, voted to authorize two representatives to continue talks with Breitung Township over the future of local law enforcement, but stopped short of agreeing to discuss a possible contract for police services from the township.

The final motion, by council member Dave Setterberg, amended his initial proposal to discuss a possible police contract with the township, but would have limited expenditures for the service to 20 percent of the city's levy, or about \$80,000. In the last full year under its former Breitung police contract, the city spent approximately \$125,000, or nearly one-third of the city's levy.

Yet the council wasn't ready to approve contract talks with Breitung, at least without more information. "I would like to see more options that we could vote on," said council member Kevin Norby.

Council member Sheldon Majerle urged the council to wait and see what kind of police department the township establishes. The town board recently approved a motion to reconstitute the police department which it disbanded back in March, although it appears it will be a smaller force than the prior department. Township officials are currently in the process of hiring a police chief, although Majerle noted that the township has only received a couple applications for the job.

In the meantime, Majerle said he was comfortable continuing to rely on the St. Louis County Sheriff for law enforcement coverage. "I'm not displeased with the way the sheriff has been handling calls that I've

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"I would like to see more options that we could vote on."

Kevin Norby, Council member

40TH BLUEBERRY/ART FESTIVAL

GONE WITH THE WIND!



Ely festival called off after a fierce storm rips through town

by KEITH VANDERVORT
 Ely Editor

ELY — "The real crusher was that Friday was so much fun," said Adam Zins as he and his wife, Tanja, tried to untangle a wire shelving unit early Saturday morning from under a mangled tent. All around them, in the middle of Whiteside Park, was

MORE COVERAGE
 'What do we do with all these pies?' Page 11

what remained of the Blueberry/Art Festival. "It looked like a war zone."

A line of thunderstorms with damaging 70-mph winds driving torrential rains hit Ely

at about 6:30 p.m. Friday night, just as the first leg of the three-day Blueberry/Art Festival was wrapping up.

The short but severe storm destroyed scores of arts vendors' displays and tents, and uprooted big trees in the park, prompting Ely Chamber of Commerce offi-

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Adam and Tonja Zins, of Appleton, Wis., above, salvage their vendor tent Saturday morning at the Blueberry/Art Festival. A mangled tent frame in Whiteside Park, top, was piled in front of a busted off spruce tree. More pictures inside. photos by K. Vandervort

ANNUAL MEETING

Greenwood sets levy at \$150,000

Reserves still higher than annual spending

by JODI SUMMIT
 Tower-Soudan Editor

GREENWOOD TWP — Greenwood Township's levy will remain at \$150,000 for next year, following action at the township's reconvened annual meeting held July 22. Township voters overwhelmingly supported the status quo levy by a vote of 46-5. The meeting was held in-person, with over 50 in attendance at the town hall, but three residents opted to cast their votes by phone.

Chairman Mike Ralston, at the regular town board meeting in July, had asked the board to increase their levy request to \$200,000, but the request was not approved by the board. He had also requested the township levy an additional \$200,000 for possible broadband expenses, another move not supported by other board members.

Mike Indihar, elected as moderator back in March when the annual meeting initially convened, continued his duties, running a relatively peaceful and productive meeting.

Treasurer Belinda Fazio presented the proposed 2022 budget, which showed the township ending this year with a balance of \$529,443, with anticipated 2022 receipts of \$282,500 (assuming a \$150,000 levy), and projected expenses of \$359,200. It showed the township ending 2022 with a fund balance of \$452,743, though some of this balance is in restricted funds — \$39,008 in the Isle of Pines bridge fund, and \$14,487 in the Greenwood Trail Fund.

Several items in the projected See...LEVY pg. 12

WILDFIRES



A wildfire near Fourtown Lake grew dramatically from 20 acres to 228 acres late Tuesday after U.S. Forest Service firefighters conducted a successful burnout operation. More coverage on Page 5B. photo by USFS



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BLUEBERRY/ART FESTIVAL

‘What do we do with all these pies?’

by Tom KOBIERSKI
ELY KIWANIS CLUB

Ely Kiwanis Club stunned by storm, community support

Now what? Ely Kiwanis Club members thought, as they woke up Saturday morning to the devastating news that the Blueberry/Art Festival had been cancelled. Some members were early to arrive back at the park to pick up the pieces, and others, who were hit by power outages, soon straggled in.

By 9 a.m., the log pavilion was cleared, and a plan for the additional 250 pies ready for Saturday sale had been hatched. Laurie Bambas, one of our Kiwanians, got the OK from her family, who owns the Ely Steakhouse, to set up shop in front of their business. Paul Zupancich, approached family member Jimmy Z., manager at the Zup’s Food Store, and got the OK to set up a table inside the store.

So, the club was in business, and the scramble was on to work out



Ely Kiwanis Club members moved their blueberry pie station to the front of the Ely Steakhouse on Saturday and Sunday following the cancellation of the Blueberry/Art Festival at Whiteside Park. submitted photo

details. Word quickly spread by mouth and social media that pie sales would start at 10 a.m. The big question became, Would people come out and buy our pies?

The answer was, Yes! In a short period of time, people were lining up to buy whole pies; not just one, but two, then four, and as the word spread around town and became more organized, groups from book clubs

were buying 18, neighborhoods wanted 13, card club members took 10 more, and on and on.

Work went on behind the scenes boxing pies fresh out of the EBCH kitchen for delivery to the selling stations. Those stations were soon filled with a festive atmosphere as townspeople walked up with supportive comments, and car after car pulled up curbside to order and pick-up pies.

At times, it was like an old-fashioned high school carwash with members flashing poster signs to passing motorists.

After three hours and 180 pies sold, more newly-baked pies were too hot to box and sell, so the amazing run came to an end for the day. Imagine, 180 blueberry pies sold-out in three hours!

Sunday should have been slower. It tradi-

tionally is for the club at the festival, but the results again proved to be remarkable. Gwen Bakken and JoEllyn Murphy, our hospital “angels” who have worked tirelessly over the years to prepare pies, mixed up and baked all the remaining ingredients ordered, so they could be used. That gave the club a total of 170-plus pies to sell on Sunday.

Soon, pie boxes became an issue as more were needed than normal, so a new way to protect and transport pies was developed on the spot. The result was that by noon, and after only two hours of sales, every pie was gone. The three days of sales totaled just under 600 pies.

Our Kiwanis Club was stunned by the generosity showed by Elyites and visitors. They are truly amazed with the results, and relieved and happy to report that they

can once again support the local youth at a level accustomed to in the past.

Thanks to the Ely Steakhouse and Zup’s Food Store. Special thanks to local Angela Campbell for her timely support, and all the other volunteers who pitched in with their help. Thankseven to one of Ely’s local food truck vendors who used our location to meet up with and return a lost wallet. The man who got his wallet back was so happy that he bought three of our pies and gave one to the finder to show his gratitude. Only in Ely.

Most of all, thanks to the Elyites who realized how important it was to continue to support the Kiwanis cause of helping children locally and world-wide by buying our blueberry pies, and who also seem to know a good piece of pie when they see it! See you at the Harvest Moon Festival!

ELY...Continued from page 1

officials late Friday to cancel the remainder of the 2021 festival.

“Ely was hit with high winds and severe weather,” Chamber officials said in a social media post, “There were a number of vendor booths that were destroyed or severely damaged. We have to cancel the rest of the festival.”

Somehow, no serious injuries were reported.

The Zinses, from Appleton, Wis. (an eight-hour drive away), was in Ely for just the third time to sell their fine arts paintings and soaps and body-care products at the city’s premier summer festival.

For this city’s 40th annual festival, a picture-perfect opening day was enjoyed by hundreds of vendors and thousands of visitors all day Friday.

“Everybody we talked to was enjoying the day. This is what’s left,” Zins said as he surveyed the landscape. “So many people put their heart and soul into their work and some travel so far to get here. It is so sad.”

With the official cancellation of 2021 Blueberry/Art Festival in Whiteside Park, the couple were mostly alone in the park at 6 a.m. Saturday as they packed up the belongings they could salvage. They decided to stay for the rest of the weekend at the cabin they rented near Babbitt. “We hoped to be back again next year,” Tanja Zins said. “Ely is such a friendly place.”

In addition to the tent and tree damage in the park, there were trees laying on top of houses and strewn across roads all over town. Minnesota Power reported more than 2,000 people without electricity while Lake Country Power had at least 3,800 customers report outages on Saturday.

By 8 p.m. Friday, the sounds of emergency vehicle sirens and chainsaws could be heard all over Ely as residents started to clean up the storm damage before darkness quickly fell.

Ely Police warned residents to stay off the streets. “Due to the severe thunderstorm and damage caused around the Ely area, we are asking the public to use caution as there are power lines and trees down,” said Ely Police Chief Chad Houde. “Please avoid these areas. The city



Blueberry/Art Festival vendors, top, walked around Whiteside Park in stunned silence minutes after a fierce storm hit the Ely area Friday night. Community members returned a porta-potty that blew down the street, middle. Uprooted trees, bottom, created hazardous conditions, prompting Chamber of Commerce officials to cancel the last two days of the festival. photos by K. Vandervort

Mike Olson and Kathy Levine had their tent set up near the northwest corner of Whiteside Park and had a whimsical collection of bowling pin sculptures and “found metal” yard art.

“We collected as many as 400 old bowling pins since 2018,” Flock said early Friday as the Blueberry/Art Festival opened. “This is just our second year in Ely,” the Duluth artist said.

Eight hours later, his tent was blown over, scattering the bowling pin art all over the park. He applauded the quick reaction from the Ely community following the storm in a Facebook post Sunday morning.

“My tent, although weighted and staked down, was blown over in the storm,” he said. “When we arrived back at the park on Friday evening, the number of people offering help, offering water, clearing downed trees was amazing. With assistance, we righted our tent. On Saturday, as we packed up, we were offered several places to set up. I was concerned about the stability of my tent due to bent structural parts, so we declined. We appreciate the care and concern you showed for all of the vendors.”

Another vendor, Larry Ricker, a photographer from Rochester, described the immediate action of the community after the storm. “I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all who stopped by my booth to offer assistance,” he said. “I had some friends helping me out so I didn’t need it, but I was overwhelmed by the number of people who offered a helping hand.”

He said he experienced a similar situation several

years ago in Red Wing.

“I don’t recall any of the community members there stopping by to help out. This definitely underscores why I’m in the process of moving to this wonderful community.”

His photography is available at “The Cabin” in downtown Ely.

Michelle and David Toutloff, of Tower, brought their “Rustic Metalz” creations to the Ely festival for the first time last weekend.

“Our tents were completely destroyed as well as a few products,” she said in a social media post. “Thankfully we were not present and nobody was injured. It was truly amazing watching the whole town come together in support. Even with the incredible support the rest of the show was canceled due to the devastation. Although we must admit the show being canceled was more devastating than the damage in the long run, for us. Thank you to everyone in Ely who came and supported the vendors, financially and physically. The local support was honestly incredible to witness. Chain saws (were) running mere minutes after the storm. People came from every direction to see who needed help, and even strangers (were seen) picking up whole booths due to some vendors not being informed of the destruction of the storm. That being said, we will be back again next year.”

Sebesta admitted that the Chamber will likely lose a substantial amount of money this year because of the storm.

“We want to make sure our vendors are taken care of,” she said.

In light of that, the Chamber was planning to launch a virtual Blueberry/Art Festival online by the middle of this week.

“We had a huge outpouring from the community and supporters asking how they can help our vendors,” Sebesta said. “We are asking vendors to tell us about their losses, and that way their supporters can reach out directly to help in any way they can.”

The virtual festival will run through the end of August. For more information, go to the Blueberry/Art Festival page at www.ely.org.

of Ely Public Works and Fire departments are out responding to lines and trees down. Please avoid the Whiteside Park area as Blueberry Art vendors attempt to clean up their booths.”

The Ely and Morse/Fall Lake fire departments were inundated with calls of trees on houses and power lines, going from call to call. Live wires caused some small fires and Highway 88 was closed due to a power line on the road.

By sunrise on Saturday, most of the vendor tents in the park were gone. A cluster of unscathed tents still stood in the northeast part of the park. Large dumpsters provided by G-Men Environmental Services were placed around the park. Most were already filled with mangled tent frames. G-Men owner Jeremiah Day was seen emptying the contents of one of his garbage trucks.

“I’m afraid it’s going to be a very busy day,” Day said to a passerby documenting the carnage with a camera.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Eva Sebesta implored people to stay out of the park again Saturday morning.

“We needed to mini-

mize foot traffic through the park as vehicles moved in and out. We also asked that vehicles avoid the park area. Keeping traffic to a minimum aided with clean up and clearing the park,” she said.

She thanked the Ely community for their support following the storm.

“We also wish to express our deepest thanks to (Ely Police) Chief Houde and all the Ely PD, along with the city of Ely workers. Thank you to the G-Men for the additional roll-offs delivered last night, too,” she said.

On Monday, Sebesta said as many as two-thirds of the 200-plus vendor booths were moderately or completely destroyed within minutes of the storm hitting the city.

“We looked at the situation, and there were concerns with the condition of the trees still standing. We couldn’t risk the public’s safety,” she said. “It was a very difficult decision to make but we had no other choice.”

The chamber’s board of directors was set to meet this week to discuss the financial ramifications for the organization as well as the vendors because of the shortened festival. “We have a no-refund policy, but

this is way beyond anyone’s control,” Sebesta said. “Just like with COVID, we provided refunds. We will be looking at what amount we will be able to provide. This was no one’s fault.”

While the Ely Chamber carries event liability insurance for the festivals they organize, that type of policy does not cover any losses they or vendors incur because of weather events.

Community responds

An underground community festival, of sorts, by the storm survivors and the Ely community sprang up around town Saturday morning. The city of Ely waved all transient merchant and food truck licenses for the weekend.

Zup’s Market in Ely opened their secondary parking lot across the street from their store to vendors displaced from the park. The Ely Kiwanis moved their operation to Sheridan Street to sell their remaining homemade blueberry pies.

Many food trucks displaced by the storm set up along Sheridan Street, mostly between 5th and 11th Avenues. The vacant lot at the corner of Sheridan and 8th Avenue was packed with food trucks by Saturday noon.