



# Fence Lines

by Mark Bernard  
copyright © 2020 by Mark Bernard

## Work consumes my weekends

The scurs and Weather Eye are in line for major Christmas presents after another week of little snow and warmer weather. Will we see a white Christmas or will it be a brownout? Starting Wednesday, mostly cloudy with a slight chance of snow. Highs in the mid-20's and lows in the low single digits. Christmas Eve, mostly sunny with highs in the low teens and lows in the upper single digits. Mostly sunny Christmas Day with highs in the low 20's and lows in the lower teens. Saturday, mostly sunny with highs in the upper 20's and lows in the low 20's. Mostly sunny on Sunday with highs in the upper 20's and lows in the mid-teens. Monday, mostly cloudy with a modest chance of snow showers. Highs in the mid-20's with lows in the mid-teens. Mostly cloudy for Tuesday with a modest chance of snow. Highs in the upper 20's and lows in the upper teens. The normal high for Christmas Day is 24 and the normal low is 6. Since we won't be in print until after the New Year, a sneak peek ahead looks like partly sunny with a high in the low 30's and lows in the mid-teens. The scurs have once again resorted to the ultimate Christmas present: a donation to the Human Fund, money for people. Not as good as the Jelly of the Month Club perhaps, but close.

The Full Moon occurs on December 29th and goes by the Full Cold Moon or sometimes known as the Long Night's Moon or The Moon before the Yule. Indeed it is The Cold Moon as it typically includes the time of year when cold sets in for good until after the middle of January. The evenings are indeed at their longest as well, with the sun rising at its latest time all year. The Ojibwe called this The Small Spirits Moon and the Sioux knew it as the Moon when Deer shed their Antlers. At the ranch we know it as The Hope Lambs are born Inside Moon.

Farming in the fields has slowed to a crawl, although, on a recent trip to Spring Valley, there were still a couple fields of corn left to be harvested on the outskirts of town. Still a wafting of manure odor occasionally, but even that hasn't been with the frequency it was earlier in December. Of course, if you have livestock, farming is an everyday event, not just seasonally. Much of that too, unless you're birthing animals is easier than it once was. Many don't calve during the coldest months anymore and most of the swine operations farrow inside in nice warm conditions. Not that it's a bowl of cherries, but compared to what was going on 60 - 70 years ago, it's a walk in the park weather-wise.

At the ranch we put our first round bales in the ewes' lot on December 15th. Up until then the pasture had been sustaining them adequately. They still venture forth and wander around the pasture after getting bored with eat-

ing hay mid to late morning. They're certainly looking like they're all bred and anybody's guess as to when the lambs will arrive. With all their wool still on, it's hard to tell, especially when doing chores in the dark. We got rid of the last of the spring's buck lambs. The bottle lamb called Lynch had become pretty mean, not uncommon for buck lambs, especially when they get 8 - 9 months old. We ran the risk of getting broken arms when he'd whack us while hanging feed pans or lifting 5 gallon water buckets over the panels. The lamb born December 4th continues to grow and allows the 4-H kids someone to play with. He's got it made with a mother who dotes on his every move and feeds him more than well. Nothing wrong with that.

Work at the home farm with the pending sale continues to consume much of the weekends. A lot of hauling stuff to a roll off this past one, which meant hauling things down the attic stairs, down the upstairs steps, then out the door and over the railing. Some of the large carpets we hauled must've been up there since we moved there in 1964. Some of them likely came from a house in town my Dad had purchased and remodeled. Some of them were on the floor in the house. It is amazing all the things that can accumulate over 56 years' time, especially when time is running short to get it cleaned out. My aching body let me know about it Monday morning.

With the extended stay away from home, Ruby lets me know she missed me upon my return. It's lucky the neighbors can't hear it as her carrying on is almost embarrassing. The yelping and whining almost sounds as though she's being beaten and she keeps it up for several minutes at a time. When she settles down it's time to get her ball out and annoy us for the rest of the evening. That's OK. She really misses us and we miss her and her antics when we're gone. She'll get extra treats and attention over the holidays. While not a brilliant conversationalist, she's very non-judgmental. Now if Ruby would just learn how to drive tractor and run the skidsteer, she could finish cleaning the barns. Another Festivus miracle!

Short notice on the column deadline this time around, so perhaps a little shorter on content than some editions. Thanks for reading it for another year. It sometimes surprises me how many people actually follow my weekly ramblings and let me know about it. It's always gratifying to know that my efforts have some value, if only to raise a smile or a remembrance of the good old days. We'll get through this COVID thing and these will someday be the good old days, at least to someone. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

See you next week...real good then.

## How much for the doggy in the window?

This is another running of the words column.

Famous reply by Abraham Lincoln regarding whether or not God was on his side. "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on my side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

Like it or not we are now in the winter season as the first day of winter was December 21.

On one of our recent tours of Big Island State Park by Albert Lea, Genie and I saw 20 adult bald eagles on the ice plus two adults by their big nest in the tree. (Their juvenile was hiding.)

A man noticed another man pulling a chain down the road, he asked, "Why are you pulling the chain?"

The other man replied, "Have you ever tried to push one?"

A South Dakota politician was on TV strongly urging not to travel during the Thanksgiving holiday. One hour later the same TV network showed him boarding an airplane for the Thanksgiving holiday. (A



## FACT OR FICTION

...you decide

by Bob Hanson, Emeritus  
copyright © 2020 by Bob Hanson

"If you repeat what you have read here, it may be used against you."

classic, "Do as I say, not as I do.") Many of the White House Christmas parties were of the "No mask, no social distancing variety."

Wonder Woman is a fantastic lady. I'm at the stage in life where Genie refers to me as her "Wonder Man."

"I wonder where I parked the car."

"I wonder where I left my phone."

"I wonder where my glasses are."

"I wonder what day it is."

Et cetera, et cetera.

There are events to be recognized daily, even weekly. On Monday we start diarrhea week. It runs until the next Monday.

Goose hunting season opened with very few geese on Fountain Lake in Albert Lea. As the area farmers fall harvesting of corn got into full swing, the geese population on Fountain Lake became too large to count. I estimated five to six thousand geese before the farmer was done. When the corn fields were void of corn, the corn fields were void of geese. Twas then, Fountain Lake was void of geese.

She tells hubby and son where to go and when on their next job. Hubby and son complete the job with son doing the last thing and that is to check and see if Dad left anything behind. What does the

family excel at? They do a great job of cleaning our furnace vents. They are known in the business world as "Steam Brothers" of Clarks Grove.

December 9, 2020 we tied the 1918 record of 52 degrees for December 9. December 10, 2020 the temp was also in the fifties. Conclusion: Weather will be weather, whether you like it or not.

Remember that old song, "How much is that doggie in the window, the one with the waggly tail?"

Genie went to a neighbors rummage sale and purchased a life size dog with lights for Christmas that is now in our window facing the street. To answer the question in the song, it is not for sale.

We toured the area Christmas lights - fantastic. We were most impressed with the drive-through lights in the baseball field at Lake Mills, Iowa. It was sponsored by area business establishments. John Deere had Santa driving a John Deere tractor instead of reindeer.

## CARES

from Page 1

On Dec. 17, The Minnesota Office of Management and Budget (MMB) released their report on the use of Minnesota's Coronavirus Relief Fund, the money distributed from the CARES Act. The state of Minnesota made \$841 million in CRF aid available for distribution to counties, cities and townships statewide.

Cities submitted \$357 million of expenditures. Of that, only \$56 million was used in small business assistance. Over \$150 million was used for payroll for public health and safety employees.

Regarding the appearance of improper use of CARES Act funds, Ellen Anderson, Communications Strategist from the (MMB), said, "The State of Minnesota made the decision to distribute CARES Act assistance to local governments, so local leaders could quickly use the funds to best protect the health, safety, and livelihoods of their residents during the global pandemic. Each local government that received CARES Act funding through the State signed a certification form agreeing to repay any funds that they use contrary to federal or state guidance. Local governments spending \$750,000 or more of federal money are required to be audited per federal law, and any other local government can be subject to review or audit by the U.S. Treasury regardless of their amount of spending. After these audits, any local government with ineligible expenses must either repay those or substitute with other eligible expenses."

The City of Owatonna received \$1,965,000 from the CARES Act. Roughly \$600,000 was reportedly spent on public safety wages.

When asked what happened to the money previously allocated for public safety wages, Finance Director Rhonda Moen said, "The city is putting it towards the city's fund balance. Right into the bank

account."

Director Moen went on to explain the reasons behind this decision. "One of the things the CARES funds were not allowed for was to reimburse lost revenues. The city lost a significant amount of revenues due to shutdowns. We're using those freed up funds to add to our fund balance."

The City of Austin received \$1,927,000 from the CARES Act and reportedly spent it all on public safety personnel.

"A lot of Minnesota entities did it this way because it was easier than associating out each individual cost associated with this [CARES Act money expenditures]," remarked Austin Finance Director, Thomas Dankert.

Director Dankert confirmed that CARES Act money reportedly used for public safety personnel is still in the city's fund balance. "Those dollars will be sitting in accounts waiting for future use. It will be up to the new incoming council to decide where and when and how to use those funds," said Dankert.

The City of North Mankato received one million dollars from the CARES Act and used none of it for small business relief. Over \$800,000 was reportedly used for public employment and safety costs. The city did, however, offer an 18 month deferred interest loan program. After 18 months the loan interest amount would increase from zero to three percent.

According to Finance Director Kevin McCann, the CARES Act funds were used to pay public safety salaries from March through November despite there being previously allocated funds. "The money we had set aside (for public safety salaries), it just sits in a pot now and will help offset any additional costs, now and moving forward with the pandemic."

Director McCann went on to say, "We had more payroll costs than what we're currently showing. Almost double what we could document and justify. The additional time of employees putting on PPE and sanitizing work stations was the

cause for the additional payroll costs incurred among hundreds of employees."

It appears the reason for the reported use of funds for public payroll salaries, for which Director McCann admits there is insufficient documentation of increase, was not because the costs were actually any higher.

When asked what the previous year's costs for public salaries were compared to now, Director McCann went on to contradict his previous statement, "For public safety, their costs are essentially being dedicated to the pandemic, so it was really just a function of shifting that around. For the other staff, essentially a lot of the duties that normally would have been getting done, got put on hold. It wasn't truly additional costs, it was duty assignments shifted."

The City of Albert Lea received \$1.3 million from the CARES Act. Only 16.5 percent was used for business assistance programs. Nearly \$800,000 was reportedly spent on public payroll for health and public safety salaries.

Albert Lea Finance Director Kristy Brutlag reported the city may spend the excess money left from the originally allocated public salaries, which are now in the city fund balance, however the city decides. She also went on to say the city was still working and still might work on future programs to help with financial relief.

Director Brutlag explained that she is not aware of the exact amount of excess funds in the city's fund balance but did mention there were significant city revenue losses to take into account regarding the city's general fund balance.

Of the 11 cities contacted, not all of them spent the majority of the CARES Act money on public safety personnel. The exceptions were Waseca, Ellendale, Geneva, and Clarks Grove.

Some cities simply gave their portion of the CARES Act money back to the county. This was the case in Geneva and Clarks Grove.

The City of Waseca received \$680,000 from the CARES Act. Of

that, a little over \$400,000 was used for grant programs to help struggling businesses and nonprofits. Waseca originally allocated \$150,000 for utility assistance programs, but only \$41,000 in requests were received.

Waseca reportedly spent \$155,000 on public safety wages. Finance Director Allisha Fischer reported that the previously allocated money for those public safety wages, which she noted cost over \$2 million annually, were put into reserve for the City to use if there are any revenue cuts in 2021.

The City of Ellendale was the only city, of the eleven reported in this article, to spend all of their CARES funds without paying public salaries.

"At first we thought this was a lot of money," remarked Ellendale Assistant City Clerk Steve Engel. "Then we thought, well if everyone applies, it's not very much. We even begged businesses to apply. We would have given more away if we could have. It took one heck of a lot of work and manpower."

The City of New Richland received \$90,000 from the CARES Act and reportedly spent those funds on previously budgeted public safety salaries. After the Star Eagle published an editorial detailing the comments made by Clerk Billings, the City of New Richland allocated \$30,000 from its General Fund for small business relief.

The first sentence of bill S.3548 - CARES Act, is, "To provide emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families and businesses affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic."

CARES Act money was not intended to pay previously budgeted public employee salaries. It appears many southern Minnesota cities did not follow federal guidelines. Cities reported this money spent the way they did to avoid accountability and to free up previously allocated funds with the intention of spending money however their city councils saw fit.

**LOGIX**®  
INSULATED CONCRETE FORMS

Your Local Distributor  
**EAGLE CONCRETE**

DIVISION OF **WASECA SAND & GRAVEL, INC.**  
13113-315th Ave. • Waseca, MN 56093  
**507-835-5150**

Also Available: Concrete pumping, rebar, ready mix concrete, landscape rock.

**NOTICE TO RESIDENTS OF BATH TOWNSHIP**

**NOTICE OF FILING FOR OFFICE IN BATH TOWNSHIP**

Any resident of Bath Township who is interested in being an Officer of the Bath Township Board may do so by filing for one (1) office of Supervisor for a three (3) year term, or one (1) office of Treasurer for a two (2) year term. Filing begins, Tuesday December 29, 2020 at 8:00 AM, and will close 5:00 PM, Tuesday January 12, 2021.

Those wishing to file must do so with Lisa Dunn, Clerk, at 77552 330th St., Ellendale, MN 56026 prior to the deadline with the \$2.00 filing fee.

**Lisa Dunn**  
Bath Township Clerk

**Star Eagle**  
is for sale at these locations:

CLARKS GROVE - Gopher Stop  
ELLENDALE - Casey's  
Lerberg's  
GENEVA - Geneva Bar & Grill  
HARTLAND - Nielsen's Conoco  
NEW RICHLAND - Wagner Foods  
New Richland Drug  
WASECA - Casey's  
Kwik Trip

**And At The Star Eagle Office**

Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri., 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**HOLIDAY HOURS**

Thursday, December 24  
**OPEN UNTIL NOON**

Friday, December 25: **CLOSED**

Thursday, December 31  
**OPEN UNTIL 1PM**

Friday, January 1st: **CLOSED**

**FSB FARMERS STATE BANK**  
COMMUNITY OWNED • COMMUNITY FOCUSED  
ALBERT LEA 507-373-1945 HARTLAND 507-845-2233  
FREEBORN 507-863-2371 www.fsbmn.bank  
Member FDIC NMLS 554275

Coming January 4th: FSB will become Arcadian Bank! Same owners. Same staff. New name!