

# UPGRADES: for Wahkon eateries

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## Wahkon

Basically, Muggs was asking the Wahkon Planning Commission to approve the restaurants desire to expand its dining space inside and outside of the building, including renovation of an existing porch and the construction of an open-air patio to be located in the current back parking lot. Muggs also showed the Council plans to expand and upgrade its kitchen facilities. After discussion with the city planner and the owner of the facility about concerns such as fencing, right-of-ways, landscaping and safety precautions, the Council voted unanimously to approve the Conditional



PHOTO BY BOB STATZ.

### Ready for expansion

**Muggs of Mille Lacs owner, Rob Dubbs, stood outside his establishment, minutes after the Wahkon City Planning Commission granted him a Conditional Use Permit allowing expansion of his facility on their grounds.**

Use Permit with stipulations recorded in the motion. According to Muggs owner,

Rob Dubbs, work on the project will begin soon and the new set-up should be op-

erative by early June.

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## Academy

the report stated that the youth had threatened them with a shovel, chainsaw and a hammer after breaking into the shed, along with making a threat against another resident. The juvenile was then apprehended and the hammer was safely taken from the juvenile.

The juvenile made the statement to police that he was constantly being harassed by other residents and had been sexually assaulted by one. The report stated that the juvenile was a victim in a recent criminal sexual conduct incident at the facility.

### March 25 assault

Law enforcement was called to the Academy after one resident assaulted another by punching them several times in the face and threatening to kill the other resident.

### March 28 reports of violence and chaos

A report was filed by police of ongoing behavioral issues at Nexus Academy where one resident kicked holes in the wall and threatened to stab staff, and a resident choked one resident and threatened another.

Several staff members expressed great frustration at the many issues going on at the Academy, according to the police report. Police reported that "it was clear that there was no safety or control" and that they continually heard staff radio traffic about residents running out of the building, some in holds, and they could see staff chasing residents outside. At one point, police could see a resident in the pond behind the building. "The totality of it was a very unsafe environment," the report stated.

Charges were filed against the youth involved by the Mille Lacs County Attorney's office.

### April 6 assaults

On April 6, law enforcement was dispatched to the Academy on another staff assault report. A female staff member reported she was punched in the face about five times by another 15-year-old male juvenile after placing him in a hold to break up a fight. The staff member had minor injuries. Another staff member, who was also punched by the youth, witnessed the event.

The staff member told law enforcement that the assaults and property damage are increasing and that "it's getting out of control." She stated that while the assault occurred, the juvenile was calling her names while he and another youth made a plan to "finish the job later." The staff members left the area with other residents in an effort "to keep them safe" for the night.

The juvenile later made a statement to police saying, "My fists probably punched her ... I usually don't punch women."

Charges were declined by the Mille Lacs County Attorney's office due to Rule 20 which states an individual can't be charged when there is a belief that a defendant may not be competent due to mental illness or developmental disability.

### April 6 assault

Law enforcement was again called to the Academy for an assault call involving two youths. A clinical supervisor stated a juvenile was out of control and they "didn't know what to do with him" and that given the results of a psychosexual evaluation, he was "not a good fit there" but that no other facility, which included a search of 26 places, would take him.

The juvenile, according to the report, had done at least \$2,000 in property damage, along with burglarizing another youth's room and kicking through a wall. The staff

member stated that all the youth "are terrified" of this particular youth but won't speak up because the youth "brags to everyone daily about his Rule 20 which he is very proud of."

Another youth gave a statement to law enforcement that they were in a fight with another youth and on the floor when another juvenile approached him and hit him "square in the head with his fist" while he was still on the ground. The youth reported feeling dizzy, nauseous and his eyes being blurry.

### April 7 assaults against staff members

Law enforcement were again called to the Academy for pending assaults. A staff member had sustained injuries as a result of youth pushing them and causing them to fall and break their foot.

The staff member also stated they would like to file charges for two other times that week they were assaulted but that they had not reported the assaults earlier due to "the way management wants things handled." The staff member stated they were "head butted in the face with a lot of force" to the point where they almost blacked out and in another incident was spit on in their eye and grabbed by the hair and had it pulled out and kicked in the jaw, ribs and sides before being able to get the youth's legs under control. The youth was brought to the Lino Lakes youth detention center.

Third and fifth degree assault charges were filed against the youth by the Mille Lacs County Attorney's office in these cases.

### Academy's response

Shannon Amundson, executive director for the facility, said in a response Friday, April 30, that their number one focus is the safety of their staff and youth and that administration continually reviews and adjusts to create

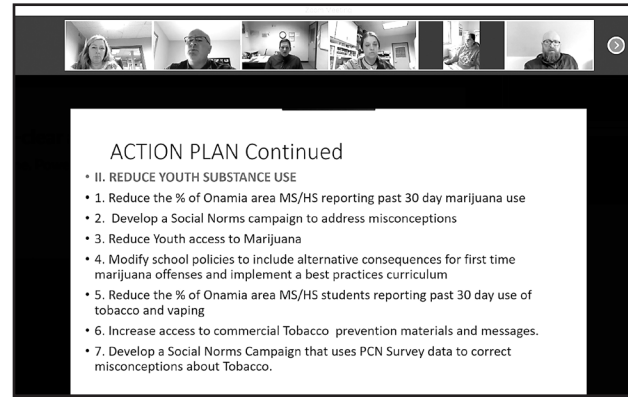
the safest, most productive environment. "Any critical incident is reported to the state as required by law. In addition, a post-analysis of the incident is conducted," said Amundson. "On occasion, for the safety of both the staff and the youth, it is beneficial for a youth to leave our agency and move to a more restrictive environment."

From January through mid-March, she added, the Academy has had a record low number of calls to law enforcement. "We believe this is due to the continuous focus we have put on staff training and the addition of new leadership positions," she said. "This past month, we saw increased activity due to the transition of new youth entering our program. We anticipate calls to law enforcement to decrease after this transition period and believe a recent increase in our staff will be an asset in maintaining a stable environment."

Amundson added that as part of the community, they are dedicated to keeping the lines of communication open. "We meet regularly with the chief of police and the mayor," said Amundson. "In April, our community advisory committee started up again as well. It is an opportunity for direct dialogue with key community members where we can share and problem-solve together."

She concluded her statement by noting that the youth the Academy serves suffer from trauma and mental health issues. "We work hard, on behalf of the youth, the families, and our communities to help them learn new skills that will address their needs and put them on a positive path. This work isn't easy, and we are grateful for our dedicated employees who are committed to making a difference."

# MAPP group recharges to address substance use in area youth



SCREENSHOT

**The Mille Lacs Area Partners for Prevention (MAPP) group met via zoom for the first time in months after obtaining new leadership and receiving a grant renewal to focus on reducing youth substance**

by T.A. LeBrun

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Mille Lacs Area Partners for Prevention (MAPP) is back on track and met on April 27 after taking a brief hiatus during a change in leadership and uncertainty of its grant renewal. But the group, which focuses on drug and alcohol prevention in area youth, has received its grant, gearing back up under new leadership and looking for new members as well.

### New grant coordinator

Drug Free Communities Coordinator, Troy Shafer, has taken over for the previous MAPP grant coordinator, Brian Miner, who has taken the regional coordinator position for the East Central Minnesota region (based in Kanabec County) through the Minnesota Department of Health.



**Troy Shafer, new MAPP director**

Shafer is from Princeton and comes with over 20 years of health education experience having worked in St. Paul and in numerous public schools in health education and outreach. Shafer spent 13 years as the director of health promotion at St. Cloud State University and recently spent seven years as a professor in the Kinesiology Department at SCSU.

What ultimately brought him to this position was his experience working for Benton County Public Health on their SHIP (Statewide Health Improvement Partnership) grant. "It gave me an appreciation for coalition work," said Shafer. "I

was truly amazed by the impact that a group of people who are working toward a common goal can have on a community. I am eager to get started, and I am excited about the opportunities of working with youth and community members to continue the great work that has been completed over the years."

The new MAPP grant is focused on increasing community collaborations and reducing youth substance use, with a focus on marijuana and vaping/tobacco products.

### Seeking community partners

The Tuesday, April 27 meeting, held via zoom, saw many current members and welcomed new ones in law enforcement, clergy and school affiliations.

Shafer outlined the group's action plan of reducing youth substance use with the following sub-goals: Reduce the percent of Onamia area middle school or highschoolers reporting past 30-day marijuana use; develop a social norms campaign to address misconceptions; reduce youth access to marijuana; modify school policies to include alternative consequences for first-time marijuana offenses and implement a best practices curriculum; reduce the percent of Onamia area middle school and highschoolers reporting past 30-day use of tobacco and vaping; increase access to commercial tobacco prevention materials and messages; and develop a social norms campaign that uses Positive Community Norms (PCN) survey data to correct misconceptions about tobacco.

Additional goals were presented of recruiting

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