

DOWN AND OUT

Wentz will have surgery on broken foot. **SPORTS**

The Forum

OF FARGO-MOORHEAD



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Forum file photo

The Cass County Courthouse in Fargo.

Setting into smoke



David Samson / The Forum

A blazing red sunset descends in the smoke-filled western sky northwest of Fargo over the weekend. Poor air quality conditions persisted in Minnesota and eastern North Dakota into Monday and are expected to impact the region into Tuesday. Smoke from Canadian wildfires has smothered the region multiple times over the past month. Minnesota environmental officials issued an air quality alert last week that was set to expire at 3 p.m. Tuesday.

Cass County gives 5.1% cost of living increase, hiring 15 new employees

By **Barry Amundson**
The Forum

FARGO — Although it's not finalized, the Cass County commissioners on Monday, Aug. 2, approved its preliminary budget for next year calling for 15 new employees and 5.1% cost of living increases for employees, but still aims to keep the tax levy the same as last year.

provide estimated tax statements to property owners by Aug. 31.

All local units of government must submit to the county preliminary budgets and levies by Aug. 10, which County Finance Director Mike Montplaisir said usually is similar to final documents.

The estimated tax statements will be mailed to residents before final public hearings on the budget by the county, city and school district.

The \$126 million county budget for 2022 will be combined with preliminary spending plans for the city and school district to

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Officials tour newly built Explorer Academy

Facility aims to help students with behavioral issues

By **Barry Amundson**
The Forum

FARGO — The new Explorer Academy to provide specialized help for Fargo students who face behavioral challenges is taking shape, and although it might not be ready by the start of school on Aug. 25, it likely will in early September.

City leaders toured the new facility on Monday night, Aug. 2, as the City Commission, School Board and Park Board all met together for a joint meeting to discuss their current and future plans.

Superintendent of Schools Rupak Gandhi said the uniquely designed building is a "school within a school" as it's being constructed on the south side of Lewis & Clark Elementary School at 1780 17th St. S.

Gandhi said it will help students with neurological conditions that can affect their ability to control behavior to have a specialized setting to develop their academic,



Michael Vosburg / Forum Photo Editor

Fargo Public Schools Superintendent Rupak Gandhi points out the emphasis on natural light during a tour Monday of the Explorer Academy attached to Lewis & Clark Elementary School.

social and personal skills to transition back into the general education setting.

The building is divided into two pods, one for elementary students and another for middle school students, with four classrooms in each pod.

The building has many

unique design factors that research has shown has helped students facing difficulties. Elements such as dimmable LED lighting, lots of natural light, soft movable furniture and specialized entrances are present.

The atmosphere is silent. As examples, the

specially designed air units operate quietly and the fire alarms are developed with a more monotone sound.

"We're really trying to reduce the triggers," Gandhi said, adding plans for the building

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Bob King / Duluth News Tribune 2011 file photo

Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Sexual offenders' hunger strike spurs discussion at Capitol

By **Dana Ferguson**
The Forum

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Department of Human Services heads agreed to expand restorative justice opportunities and incorporate more advocate perspectives

at a Moose Lake Sex Offender Program facility as part of a deal to end a two-week hunger strike among detainees.

Nancy Johnston, executive director of the

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Today's weather



89°
64°

Partly Cloudy
Details, B8



LIFE: Detroit Lakes nonprofits team up with WE Fest for fundraisers.

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Minn. universities mandate masks, ND officials undecided

By **Jeremy Turley**
The Forum

BISMARCK — Several universities in Minnesota will begin requiring masks on campus to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but North Dakota higher education officials haven't yet decided on the issue.

The University of Minnesota announced Monday, Aug. 2, it will require all students, staff and visitors to wear masks indoors at its five campuses starting Tues-

day. The Minnesota State public college system said last week face coverings will be required at campuses located in counties with higher levels of COVID-19 transmission, though many of the system's 37 campuses lie in areas with low rates of spread.

The North Dakota State Board of Higher Education could issue a mask requirement for North Dakota's 11 public colleges and universities, however the board



Alyssa Goelzer / The Forum

North Dakota State University students line up to take pictures with the masked bison statue on campus during orientation day on Aug. 21, 2020, in Fargo.

left decisions on masks last year to officials at each institution, and a localized approach is the most likely outcome this time around, universi-

ty system spokeswoman Billie Jo Lorus said.

A panel of North Dakota college presidents and

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