



Roaming cougars

Would you know a cougar?

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Section champs

Monti volleyball ends atop the standings.

See Sports

MONTICELLO Times

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Covering the cities of Monticello and Big Lake, and Wright and Sherburne counties \$1

Wright COVID deaths nearly double in two weeks

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

COVID-19 wave hits
Sherburne County hard.
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Deaths in Wright County due to the coronavirus have nearly doubled in the past two weeks.

Five COVID-19 related deaths were reported in Wright County in the reporting period ending Thursday, Nov. 19.

That brings the county total of COVID deaths to 30, with 14 of those coming in the last two weeks, health department officials said.

For the third consecutive week, reports of positive cases of COVID-19 in Wright County have shattered previous week numbers.

The news comes as Thanksgiving approaches with many planning family gatherings - something the Center for Disease Control fears will result in even more confirmed cases of the coronavirus.

"The county has shattered the exist-

ing highs for the number of confirmed cases as the surge in new contractions throughout Minnesota and the United States has hit close to home with community spread of the virus," according to officials with the Wright County Department of Public Health.

For the reporting period ending Thursday, Nov. 19, 1,379 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in Wright County. That brings the county's total number of confirmed cases to 5,819, according to the Wright County Department of Public Health. Data shows 3,088 of those cases, or 53 percent, as being reported in the last three weeks of the eight-month pandemic.

The number of cases that have required hospitalizations nearly doubled

the previous single-week high, according to health department officials. A total of 248 Wright County residents have been hospitalized as the result of COVID, an increase of 43 from the previous week. The single-week high in new hospitalizations prior to this week was 22.

And those contracting the coronavirus haven't just been admitted to area hospitals. Many are needing specialized care in intensive care units, Wright County COVID data shows.

New patients requiring admission to an Intensive Care Unit rose by six, bringing the county total to 36, with one-third of those coming in the last two weeks, according to the Wright County Department of Public Health.

The Wright County Department of Public Health encouraged people to continue wearing a mask, washing hands, and staying home if you have or were exposed to COVID-19. The department

also encouraged people to get a COVID test if they are feeling sick.

In the two weeks since October 29, cases of COVID-19 have increased by 258 from 412 cases on Thursday, Oct. 29 to 670 reported cases on Thursday, Nov. 12.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Monticello increased by 211 from November 12 to November 19. There have now been 881 cases of COVID confirmed in the city of Monticello. Monticello continues to have the third-most number of reported cases in Wright County. The city's 881 confirmed cases trail the 1,016 cases confirmed in Buffalo and the 851 cases reported in St. Michael.

Other Wright County communities near Monticello are seeing the following COVID numbers: Otsego, 577; Albertville, 569; Maple Lake, 186; and Clearwater, 139.

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Swan Park is the 'wonderful' in the book of city secrets

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

If you're looking for some of the most weird, wonderful and obscure attractions in the Twin Cities, look no further than Monticello.

That's according to author Julie Jo Severson, who has included Monticello in her book, *Secret Twin Cities: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure*.

We're not talking dinner at a spooky mansion called Dino's Other World here. That's so 1970s.

Severson has included in her book Monticello's own Swan Park and the thousands of swans that have frequented the bank of the Mississippi River along Mississippi Drive for decades.

In her book, Severson doesn't chalk up Monticello's Swan Park as weird. No it is obscure. Monticello and its beloved swans fall under the category of "wonderful," the author said.

Reddy Press charged Severson with the task of finding her own weird, wonderful, and obscure. She was given one year to complete the task, write the stories, and take photographs.

"I reached out to my college friends, bartenders, archivists, and even food truck vendors in search of the weird, wonderful, and obscure," Severson said. In the case of Monticello and its swans, Severson turned to family. She went back in time remembering a story her brother told when he once viewed the swans on a trip through Monticello.

Every site noted in "*Secret Twin Cities: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure*" was visited in person by Severson.

"I wanted to experience the things I was writing about myself," she said.

It was an experience that allowed Severson to find the deep back stories of the attractions in the guide.

It allowed me to tour the Twin Cities with a new set of eyes," she added.

When it came to Swan Park and the Trumpeter swans, says meeting with Jim Lawrence was nothing short of an honor.

Jim Lawrence's wife Sheila was the original caretaker of the swans, a job she did from her Mississippi Drive for decades until she passed away in 2011. Jim Lawrence promised his wife he would continue caring for the swans after her passing.

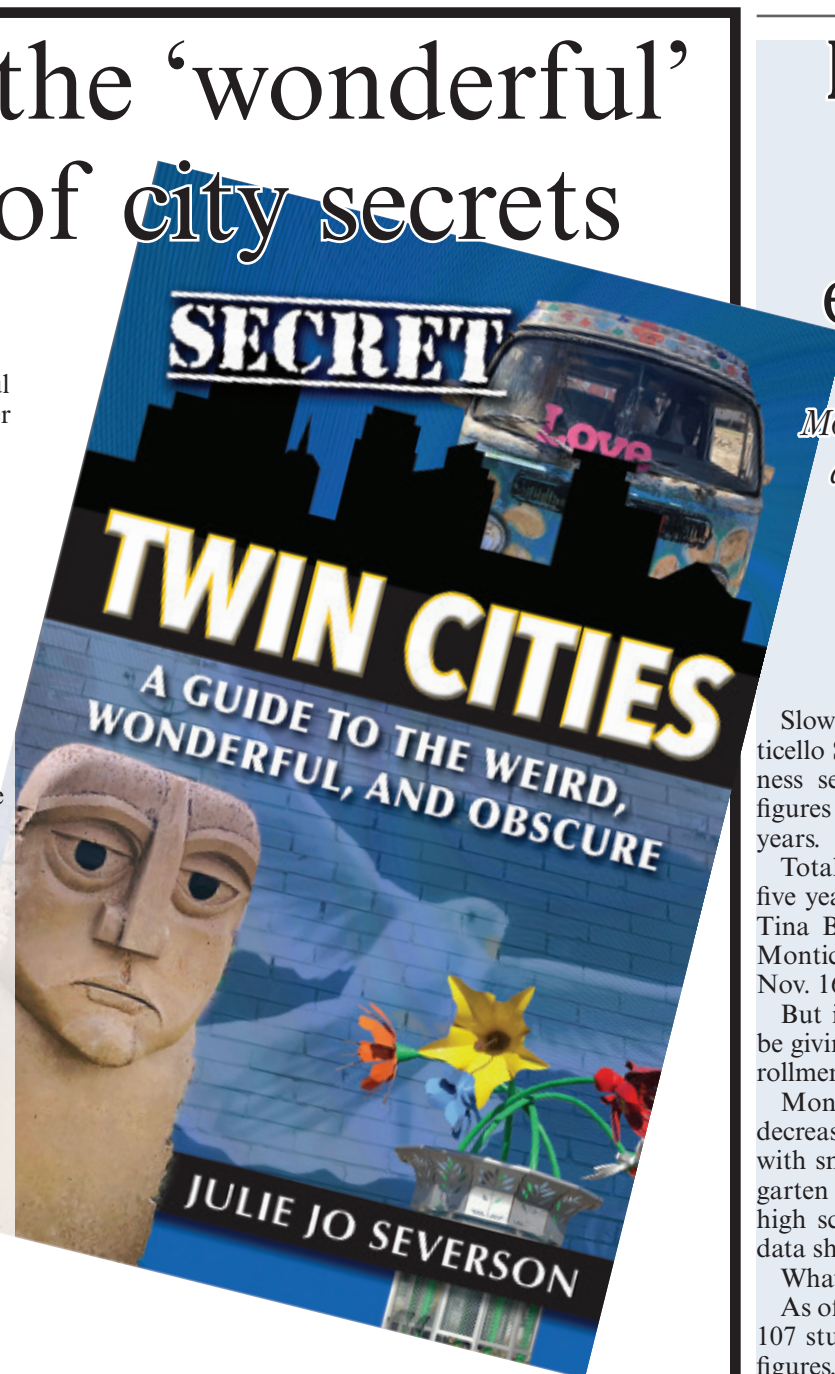
"I talked to Jim Lawrence a couple times by phone, and we exchanged emails," Severson said.

She then came to Monticello in person.

"I was mesmerized by his passion- by his and Sheila's passion," Severson said.

"I was so honored to hear the story of the swans from him first-hand," she said.

Severson also noted that on the day she visited Monticello



cello and the swans was the same day as her daughter's birthday.

"I sent her a video of the swans and told her they were singing happy birthday," Severson said.

Severson said readers of "*Secret Twin Cities: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure*" should find fascinating the sequence of events that brought the swans to the bank of the Mississippi River near Jim Lawrence's Monticello home.

"It's a wonderful story of Jim and Sheila's legacy, and the legacy of the swans," Severson said.

"*Secret Twin Cities: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure*" is available direct from Julie Jo Severson on her website at www.secrettwincities.com, the lone place to get signed copies by the author. The book can also be purchased at book stores and at online retailers such as Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com and Target.com.

Monticello Schools forecast enrollment decline

Models suggest years of decline are over for the next five years

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

Slow and stable. That's how the Monticello School District's director of business services described the enrollment figures of the school district the past five years.

Total enrollment growth for the past five years is -1 student, or zero percent, Tina Burkholder told members of the Monticello School Board on Monday, Nov. 16.

But it appears slow and stable might be giving way to a decline in student enrollment, Burkholder predicted.

Monticello's enrollment is projected to decrease over the next three to five years with smaller class sizes entering kindergarten and larger class sizes exiting the high school, Burkholder said based on data she collected.

What's that bode for the future?

As of October 1, enrollment was down 107 students over last year's enrollment figures. That's a 2.53 percent decline.

Enrollment models for the next five years suggest annual enrollment declines, with enrollment estimated to dip below 4,000 students in the 2025-26 school year, when an enrollment of 3,984 is projected.

To reach that projection, Burkholder examined many different scenarios by utilizing enrollment projection models. The enrollment projections shape district budgeting and policy decisions in the coming years.

Among resources used by Burkholder to make the enrollment projections were: housing market, economic conditions, Wright County births, census popula-

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