



Rib Cage

A new rib joint opens inside local brewery.

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Hazardous

A blighted property is declared hazardous.

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MONTICELLO Times

Thursday, Nov. 19, 2020

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

'Recipe for Disaster'

Dozens of heroes on scene of 29-vehicle pile-up



Tom Fenton / Adams Publishing Group

Flames and thick smoke can be seen coming from semi trucks on fire in a multi-vehicle pile-up on Interstate 94 in Monticello on Thursday, Nov. 12. Twenty-nine vehicles - 15 of them semis- were involved in the crash that miraculously resulted in no major injuries, according to the State Patrol.

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

Nine people escaped with just minor injuries in a 29-vehicle chain-reaction crash Thursday, Nov. 12 on Interstate 94 in Monticello that Monticello Assistant Fire Chief Jake Olinger called "by far the worst scene I have ever seen on the interstate."

A fiery, 29-vehicle pile-up on Interstate 94 in Monticello resulted in sections of the highway being closed for more than nine hours.

With multiple crashes, victims needing extrication from vehicles and at least five vehicle fires, Olinger said the incident was the greatest opportunity for

multiple fatalities and serious injuries that he has come across in his career as a firefighter.

"It was a recipe for disaster," Olinger said. "We were fortunate that everything worked out," he said.

There were dozens of heroes on the scene of the incident, being attributed in part to a rare snow squall passing through Monticello's I-94 corridor.

From the Monticello Fire Department's 14 firefighters on scene and three retired firefighters who lent a crucial hand, crews from Burda's Towing and its sister company Collin's Towing, troopers from the Minnesota State Patrol, personnel from the Minnesota Department of

Transportation, CentraCare Ambulance, and mutual aid firefighters from Buffalo and Albertville, bringing the victims of the crash to safety and clearing the highway of debris was truly team effort, Olinger said. New equipment purchased with the Monticello Fire Department's new tower truck also played an instrumental role in saving lives and keeping injuries to a minimum, Olinger said.

Investigators with the Minnesota State Patrol were still searching Monday, Nov. 17, for the driver of a semi trailer who might have instigated the chain-reaction crash in the westbound lane of Interstate 94 near the County Road 18/39 exit in Mon-

ticello. Witnesses indicate the semi was stopped on I-94 in the flow of traffic. Witnesses also indicate the driver may have been clearing snow from the windshield, according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Following the I-94 crash, the Monticello Times received on its Facebook page a post from Monticello resident Ryan Peter: I can absolutely tell you what caused this. A semi stopped on the freeway to clean his windshield right in front of me. The crash happened right behind me 100 feet back. I was scared to death."

In addition to the semi driver,

the State Patrol was seeking the several drivers that left the scene before first responders arrived.

The State Patrol is asking for drivers who left the scene or anyone with information regarding the incident to contact the Minnesota State Patrol St. Cloud District Office at 320-223-6666.

Half of the 29 vehicles involved in the incident were semis, according to Sgt. Jesse Grabow of their Minnesota State Patrol.

Five of the semis were burned down to nothing, Burdas Towing owner James Trantina posted on his company's social media page.

Crash / See page 2

Wright COVID cases increase 10-fold

Monticello has had 670 cases, while Big Lake has seen 780 cases reported

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

Reported cases of coronavirus in Wright County have increased nearly 10 times between the first week of October and the first week of November, according to the Wright County Department of Public Health.

"In the first week of August, there were 84 cases reported among residents. In the first week of November there were 829," health department officials said in a Friday, Nov. 13 statement.

"The fact is that, more virus is circulating in our communities than at any point in the pandemic," health

department officials stated.

Since October 1, there have been 17 deaths among residents caused by COVID-19. There have been 25 total deaths reported in the county due to COVID-19.

Last week, on Thursday, Nov. 12, 205 cases of COVID-19 were reported in Wright County, a record one-day total.

As of Thursday, Nov. 12, 4,440 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Wright County since the virus was first reported in the Spring of 2020. Twenty-five Wright County residents have died because of the virus.

"These increases are directly impacting our local school districts

and our health care systems. The increased amount of virus in our communities puts us all at greater risk, especially our teachers, nurses and doctors," health departments officials said in a statement.

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 in-

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Health officials hint at pause in winter sports

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

A pause in the start of the winter high school sports season could be around the corner if Minnesota health officials have their say.

Cases of COVID-19 among participants in high school sports are starting to climb, Gov. Tim Walz said in his Monday, Nov. 16 press conference.

There's deep concern about competition among schools and their student athletes, Walz said.

State Health Commission Jan Malcolm addressed the future of high school sports during the hour-long update on Minnesota's COVID crisis.

"From a health-advice standpoint, we'd like to see sports put on pause," Malcolm said.

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