

# Merry Christmas

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## 'Severely tainted' — Judge sides with Daley Farm

by CHRIS ROGERS

The Winona County officials who denied the Daley Farm's feedlot expansion were clearly not impartial. Olmsted County District Court Judge Kevin Mark declared on Monday. The judge has not yet issued a final decision on what to do next, and he

hinted that he may not support the Daley Farm's request for de facto approval of the expansion. However, on the case's central issue — bias — the judge sided with the Daleys in a strongly worded decision, breathing new life into their years-long, controversial quest to expand the county's largest dairy farm and rebuking Winona

County officials for crossing boundaries in their handling of the project.

"This decision made by the Board of Adjustment is so severely tainted by members of the Board of Adjustment that it can't stand," Mark said.

The ruling comes in a lawsuit challenging the Winona County Board of Adjust-

ment's (BOA) 2019 decision not to allow the Lewiston dairy farm to expand its herd in excess of the county's normal limit. Subpoenaed emails and records showed that two of those BOA members were actively involved in a Land Stewardship Project

see **DALEY** page 3a

## COVID vaccines come to Winona



by CHRIS ROGERS

In a potential turning point in the fight against the coronavirus, Dr. Joseph Kaiya became the first person in Winona to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Kaiya was one of 15-20 Winona Health staff who rolled up their sleeves on Friday. Winona Health is a hub for local distribution of the Pfizer vaccine because the hospital has the ultra-cold freezers needed to store it, and the health system plans to offer shots to all of its front-line hospital staff, nursing home residents, and nursing home staff next week. Other local nursing homes, ambulance crews, and COVID testing staff are expected to receive shots of the Mod-

erna vaccine starting the week of December 28. "For me, it represents hope," Kaiya said of the historic moment. "It's been a long year, and it's been tough, but there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

"I'm so excited," said Winona Health Emergency Department Technician Morgan Whyte, who was the second person to be vaccinated on Friday. Winona Health Chief Nursing and Operating Officer Sara Gabrick stated, "It's truly exciting. To have a vaccine out there that's this effective, this soon is terrific."

Over the course of this year, nurses, doctors,

Photo by Chris Rogers

■ Winona Health Director of Emergency and Urgent Care Services Beth Poulin gave physician Joseph Kaiya a shot of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine last Friday.

see **VACCINES** page 8a

## Local schools plan for in-person and hybrid learning

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

In response to recently released state guidance that allows elementary students to return to the classroom in January regardless of local COVID infection rates, area school districts are planning to welcome elementary students back in-person and aiming to have secondary students learn in a hybrid model.

Under the new state guidance, rates of COVID transmission in counties are not the central piece of information school districts must consider in deciding which learning model to implement for elementary students. Elementary schools are allowed to resume in-person classes so long as they follow certain COVID precautions. The infection rates still apply to decisions regarding whether middle and high school students may return to the classroom.

Required COVID protocols include students returning to school on a rolling basis, staff members always wearing a face shield and mask and schools offering COVID tests provided by the state for staff members every other week.

At Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS), in-person learning is scheduled to begin for kindergarten, first

see **LEARNING** page 7a

## 'A consistent, positive force of leadership'

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Julie Gardner was about to hike the Grand Canyon for four days with friends when she got the call. Gardner's son, a Cotter Schools football player, had dislocated his shoulder, and Cotter Schools President Sister Judith Schaefer was calling Gardner from Mayo Clinic.

Gardner said she would get the next flight home. Schaefer, whom community members fondly call Sister Judy, responded that she had the situation under control and Gardner should stay where she was. Schaefer then remained with Gardner's son and kept Gardner updated on how he was doing into the wee hours of the morning.

"What principal does that?" Gardner said. "She's a mom, a sister, a friend; she's everyone you want in your life to me. I cannot possibly say enough good things about this person, who I'm so blessed to have in my life."

Sister Judy is known throughout Winona for her work in the field of education. Schaefer has taught at all levels of the education system, from elementary school to adult education. She has served as an educator in a number of states, including Iowa, Wisconsin and Montana.

see **LEADERSHIP** page 5a

## Local groups distribute meals



Photo by Alexandra Retter

■ Winona Area Public Schools nutrition staff member Vicky Wenzel helps load a bus with meals that are ready to be delivered. The district is providing free meals for those under 18 throughout this school year.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Winona Volunteer Services (WVS) Client Services Coordinator Kay Peterson understands the importance of getting meals to those in need because of her experiences with her father, she said. "I guess with my own father not necessarily being able to make meals all the

time, I can just relate so much to how valuable it is to have someone drop off a cooked meal," Peterson noted. "And if I wasn't there helping my dad, then I would want a volunteer to be dropping off meals."

Throughout the pandemic, a small army of workers and volunteers have worked, day in and day out, to get warm

meals to Winonans in need. These workers and volunteers have dedicated their time to putting together and distributing meals at WVS, Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) and the Winona Catholic Worker.

Volunteers with WVS' home-delivered meals program distribute meals to those

see **MEALS** page 9a

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# Winona OKs roundabouts, new budget

by CHRIS ROGERS

Here come the roundabouts. In a 5-2 vote on Monday, the Winona City Council signed off on the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) plan to construct four roundabouts on Mankato Avenue. That includes a traffic circle at Highway 61 and Highway 43, which will be one of most, if not the most, heavily traveled in the state.

Some citizens railed against the proposal, arguing that the roundabouts would cause greater delays, lead to more accidents, or cause confusion. However, Mn/DOT traffic engineers said detailed analyses showed the traffic circles would actually reduce congestion, and in numerous state and federal studies, roundabouts have been shown to significantly reduce crashes, especially serious injuries and fatalities. Mn/DOT Project Manager Chad Hanson said the intersection of highways 61 and 43 is one of the most crash-prone intersections in Southeast Minnesota. Mankato Avenue businesses backed Mn/DOT's plan, and a majority of the City Council trusted the experts.

"Let the engineers engineer this project out," City Council member George Borzyskowski said earlier this year. "The state pays them hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. They're well-educated men and women who design roads and roundabouts and bridges. Let them design this."

City Council member Al Thurley voted against the proposal, citing citizen feedback he received. "I haven't really had any response that has allowed for an enthusiastic endorsement of this particular plan. What I'm hearing from people is that they would prefer — at least at Highway 61 and 43 — a traditional intersection," he said.

Mn/DOT did consider keeping Mankato Avenue's stoplights instead of converting them to roundabouts. Hanson said traffic circles were chosen because of the safety benefits, as well as reduced wait times.

City Council member Paul Schollmeier also voted against the project after raising concerns about pedestrian safety. In several ways, the project will have advantages for pedestrians and bikes, such as new sidewalks, a wide bike path, and shorter crossing distances. However, pedestrians will have to step out in front of traffic to cross the roundabouts — there will be no traffic lights making cars stop for them — and Schollmeier said he didn't trust speeding motorists to stop. "I don't believe that those vehicles that are going 55-60 miles per hour in a 50-miles-per-hour zone are going to be willing to slow for pedestrians to cross," he stated.

The curvature of the road will physically force drivers to slow down to 20 miles per hour as they approach the roundabouts, Hanson stated. Mn/DOT added button-activated flashing lights at crosswalks in an attempt to assuage pedestrian safety concerns.

The intersection as it exists today is harrowing for pedestrians to cross, Borzyskowski said, arguing the roundabouts will be an improvement.

Construction is slated for 2022. As it plans construction staging, Mn/DOT will meet with businesses and the hospital along the route and will hold at least one public meeting, Hanson said. "We will be providing access at all times to all the people along the corridor," he promised.

The project will cost a total of \$12 million, with \$1.8 million borne by the city, according to Mn/DOT.

## Alternative response team, 4.8% tax increase passes

In a 6-1 vote, the City Council approved a \$50.5-million budget for 2021 that includes \$9.9 million in local property taxes — a 4.8-percent increase over last year — and \$185,000 for the new Alternative Response Team (ART).

The ART will be a two-person team of social work/public health professionals that can respond to certain emergency calls instead of police. The program grew out of a push by community members to send mental health and social service professionals instead of police to deal with calls involving low-level domestic abuse, mental illness, and poverty. Winona Police Department leaders backed the program, saying the ART would be better equipped to address the root causes of those calls and would help relieve the workload for police. Many of the program's details have yet to be worked out, and city officials don't expect to launch the ART until the second half of 2021. The \$185,000 budget approved by the City Council on Monday was a decrease from the program's previous estimated cost: \$225,000.

The ART is a need, not a want, City Council member Eileen Moeller said. "I think it's very essential for our city," she stated. "Working in nonprofits, we often say that you show your organizations priorities through your budget, no matter what you say, and I think now is the time to show that we value the safety — and all meanings of the word safety — of our community members."

In May, City Council George Borzyskowski declared, "I will not support any budget that has a tax increase, and I will not support any new positions that are add-

ed to the city unless they are police- and fire-related." On Monday, Borzyskowski endorsed the ART and agreed to approve a tax increase to fund it.

City Council members Paul Schollmeier, Pam Eyden, and Al Thurley tried to add \$15,000 to the budget and tax levy to fund continued emerald ash borer (EAB) treatments to keep ash trees in Winona parks alive, but the rest of the council overruled them. "It'd be enough to save about half of the bad areas in really critical parts of town, and that's Sinclair Park, Huff Street, both side of Huff Street, and Windom Park," Eyden said, making a pitch for EAB treatments to avoid a mass die-off of ash trees in those areas. "I, personally, think that it is money well spent," she stated.

"I'm not sure it is money well spent," Mayor Mark Peterson replied. "I think the trees are going to die. I think we've done a lot over the last number of years to minimize the number of dead ash trees, but at this point, I'm not comfortable continuing to spend money on that."

After the EAB funding failed, City Council member Michelle Alexander cast the lone dissenting vote against the overall budget and tax levy. Pointing to struggling businesses and laid-off workers reeling from the ongoing pandemic, Alexander said, "I just can't in good conscience raise taxes at any level."

Also on Monday, the City Council selected the Winona Post as its official newspaper for 2021.

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## Leadership

continued from page 1a

"I love every age ... Every age has its fun elements," Schaefer said. "The little ones are fun, and yet college kids are so great because you're able to have really great conversations. And adults are a whole different thing, because they're so eager to learn. They're there because they want to be. So, I've enjoyed every level."

Her educational aspirations began when she was in grade school. While growing up in Denver, Colo., her teachers were Dominican sisters. "They were smart, they were kind, they were loving women, and that was inspiring to me," Schaefer shared. She wished to emulate them and follow in their footsteps, she stated.

"I, even in early grade school, realized I wanted to do the same. So I never looked at anything other than education ... It was mostly the example of teachers I had who believed in me and brought out more than I thought I had," Schaefer noted.

Through following the sisters' example, Schaefer became the first person in her family to attend college. She studied elementary education.

She also became a sister herself as a member of the Sinsinawa Dominicans. To become a sister, she moved from Denver to the sisters' headquarters in Wisconsin. She then spent about two-and-a-half years studying theology and what it would mean to be a sister. She next spent five years completing ministry training through working with sisters in parishes and schools. She was then ready to take her vows for life.

She has appreciated getting to know people on a deep level as a sister, she said.

"I do think sometimes because I'm a sister, I get to be part of people's lives sometimes at really very sacred moments, like dying, sadness and sickness, and that's a real privilege," Schaefer shared.

She has enjoyed living and working in many places as a sister, too, she said. "I think that's broadened me and made me more open than I might have been if I lived in Denver my whole life," she noted.

One of Schaefer's initial experiences as an educator was teaching a first grade class. She said she appreciated the unique ways her students put information together. In one instance, her students were drawing pictures of people in their community who helped others. A student asked how to draw glasses, so Schaefer and the student discussed the circles and lines that go into glasses. She then asked the student who they were trying to draw.

"He said, 'God.' I said, 'How do you know God has glasses?'" Schaefer shared. "He said, 'We go to his house every week.' The priest had glasses, so in his mind, going to the priest's house was going to God's house."

Schaefer also traveled throughout Montana to teach classes regarding topics like communion and confirmation at differ-

ent parishes. She taught Bible studies for adults, as well.

"You just met such interesting people, because in a parish setting, you get to see the whole family and be part of people's lives at important moments, like baptism, communion, graduation and marriage," Schaefer stated.

Schaefer said her teaching philosophy centers around helping people relate to the material that she is presenting. She and her students completed many service projects to put what they were learning about religion into action during her years as a high school teacher, she noted.

"I think for me, the important thing was whatever I'm teaching, to try to make it connect with whatever group I'm with," Schaefer said.

To help students connect with course material, Schaefer would try to get a laugh out of them, which sometimes happened at her own expense, she said.

"I discovered after I taught college for about five or six years, people would say to me, 'You should be a stand-up comedian.' I'd say, 'What?' I realized I'd developed over the years a way of getting kids engaged by telling jokes and making fun of myself to get their attention," Schaefer shared. "For me, the important thing is connecting with people's lives and people's real questions."

Sometimes, it took a little while for her to help a student see the worth of her courses' content, she said, but she was always glad when they did.

While teaching a religion course at a university, Schaefer had a student who sat in the back of the classroom for an entire semester. He unexpectedly came forward with a positive message as the course concluded, however. "At the end, he said, 'Well, sister, this wasn't as bad as I thought it would be,'" Schaefer said. "That was a real compliment, that at least he was more open to seeing some value in it than he had been when he first came to me."

Families of her students have noticed her dedication. Gardner said she always saw Sister Judy at sporting events, regardless of the weather. "She is just incredibly loyal ... I'd look up and there she'd be," Gardner shared. "And it's 10 below, and there is Sister Judy, all bundled up."

Though Gardner's children have all graduated, she said she knows Sister Judy would immediately help her if she needed something. "She's definitely a confidante," Gardner said. "I could trust her with my heart and soul."

Schaefer's colleagues have also witnessed her passion for education. Scott and Karen Sorvaag met Sister Judy when they all worked at Saint Mary's University (SMU), and they are currently her neighbors.

Initially, Schaefer was Scott's mentor for a leadership program at SMU.

"She's an extraordinarily good listener, and when she offers advice, it's always carefully thought through," Scott stated. "So, she was always a really good sound-



Photo by Alexandra Retter

■ Cotter Schools President Sister Judith Schaefer has taught in many states and instructed students at all levels over the course of her career in the field of education.

ing board."

Scott said that whenever he was in a meeting with Schaefer and others, he was confident she would help those in attendance move forward properly. "I always felt that when we were looking at ways to improve quality of life in the Winona area, Sister Judy ought to be at the table," Scott shared. "And when she was, she was a consistent, positive force of leadership in those dialogues."

As a neighbor, Schaefer will mow their lawn to help them out, and in the warmer parts of the year, they will enjoy good conversation with her on their deck, Scott said.

Karen said that many of the memorable moments she has shared with Sister Judy center on informal conversations they have had about teaching, learning, caring for others and aiming to be good people. "I think one of the things I've always appreciated about Sister Judy is she is authentic," Karen noted. "What she says, she means, and she follows it with actions."

"That's something I've always valued, and having a model like that to look to and remember why that is so important ... really has reminded me how to continue on that path," Karen added.

Karen recalled that Schaefer always considered what would be best for students during faculty meetings at SMU. Karen added, "She values relationships. She commits to relationships. She leads in relationships. So all her leadership is connected to working with those she is there to serve and ... not having them work for her, but her working for them."

When students recognize their abilities and find additional depths within themselves, Schaefer experiences some of her happiest moments as an educator, she said.

"I think probably for me, the biggest joy is always when, either in conversation or class, someone else sees more in themselves than they did before," Schaefer shared. "They see more potential or they

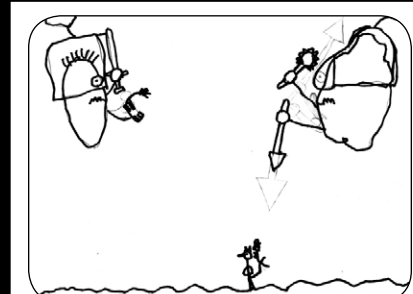
see a new idea or they see that they can do what they didn't think they could do ... I think educational transformation, when done well, hopefully changes us for the better, helps us grow and go beyond what we thought we could do."

Some more challenging moments as an educator arise when it is difficult to grasp others' perspectives, Schaefer said. It is hard to understand why a student would be mean to another student, for example, she said.

Amid the challenges schools are facing during the pandemic, she has remained motivated to stay in the field of education by trying to create some positive learning experiences, she said. "...Nobody asked for this, and nobody deserves some of the sufferings and losses people are going through," Schaefer stated. "And so I feel a responsibility to at least then try to ... provide as much good education as we can, given the limitations we have."

Schaefer added she feels Cotter Schools has a bright future. "I don't have as many years to come as I've finished, but I hope to just keep it growing, and at some point, hand it on to somebody else, better than I found it," Schaefer noted.

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## WEATHER Forecast

source: weather.com

### WEDNESDAY

Rain/Snow

High 43°  
Low 3°

### THURSDAY

Partly  
Cloudy

High 8°  
Low -1°

### FRIDAY

Partly  
Cloudy

High 21°  
Low 14°

### SATURDAY

Partly  
Cloudy

High 28°  
Low 16°

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