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JOURNEY IN GLASS

Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Fine art studio glass artist Steven Weagel lifts a drinking glass for an inspection Wednesday at his exhibition tent at the Crow Wing County Fair. Weagel with WeagelWorks and Bruce Nelson conducted glass blowing exhibitions every hour on the hour this week for the crowds that passed their tent.

Artist's sculptures reflect the beauty of intricate glass work

By Steve Kohls
Brainerd Dispatch

Molten glass tempered with flux combined with a molten personality, tempered with an artist's eye and ability plus skills learned in a lifetime of technical expertise working with metal, Steven Weagel amazes audiences at the Crow Wing County Fair this week. With his associate, Bruce Nelson, the pair has been blowing fine art glass every hour on the hour at a tent near the administration building. Weagel, who owns WeagelWorks, a fine art glass and metal sculpture studio near Pequot Lakes, began as a physics major at Mankato State College. It was the influence Ken Ipsen, an instructor at Mankato, who taught studio art glass, lessons that changed Weagel's life. At Mankato State, Ipsen was a glass blower, who had learned the 3,000-year-old art at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, the epi-center of fine art glass blowing in the '60s. Weagel fell in love with the art of creating fine art blown glass and was among students who carried the torch for the art medium.

GLASS: Page A14

Credit union collects tech to help students

By Frank Lee
Brainerd Dispatch

Affinity Plus Federal Credit Union in Baxter wants to provide local students in need with reliable computers required for their education and development. Tech Drive Tuesdays is a partnership

between Affinity Plus Federal Credit Union, Minnesota Computers for Schools and KARE 11 to collect unwanted or unused computer equipment to ensure students have the technology they need to stay connected and be successful.

"This event is a way to create more digital equity as it allows for computer equipment to be re-housed and repurposed for students of all ages," said Hillary Kline, a spokesperson for the St. Paul-based not-for-profit banking institution.

To further support local students, for every usable laptop donated that is five years old or less, the Affinity Plus Foundation will donate \$150 to Minnesota Computers for Schools to purchase another repurposed computer for a student or school in the community.

TECH: Page A11

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Music festival comes to halt

Leaders report 2 musicians tested positive



Contributed Christian Reif, resident conductor of the San Francisco Symphony and music director of that Symphony's youth orchestra, conducts a Lakes Area Music Festival concert in 2017.

By Chelsey Perkins
Brainerd Dispatch

Organizers of the Lakes Area Music Festival announced Friday afternoon, Aug. 6, the remaining activities and performances of its 2021 season are canceled due to two positive COVID-19 tests among performers. The final program of this year's festival will stream live Friday night featuring a three-person baroque ensemble. The festival reported two of those performers are a couple, all three are able to perform masked without anyone else in the room and all tested negative for COVID-19 as of Friday. In an email to supporters and ticket holders, Scott Lykins, artistic and executive director of the festival, expressed deep regret over the decision, noting a number of precautions were in place to reduce the chances of coronavirus transmission. All performers were vaccinated, organizers reported, including those who tested positive.

LAMF: Page A12

Fair honors '20, '21 farm families

By Theresa Bourke
Brainerd Dispatch

Two families were honored Thursday, Aug. 5, at the Crow Wing County Fair as the 2020 and 2021 Farm Families of the Year.

Louis and Megan Schlegel gathered up five of their six children to accept their award of the 2021 Crow Wing County Farm Family of the Year.

The Schlegels are the fourth generation of their family to own the farm, which took off in 1908 about 15 miles south of

Brainerd under the care of Megan's great-grandparents Phillip and Annie Fleischhacker. It proceeded down to their son Leo and his wife Donna-Mae, then their grandchildren Jeff and Cindy Fleischhacker and finally the Schlegels about five years ago.

"It's a nice compliment," Megan Schlegel said of the honor, though the award was also overwhelming, as the Schlegels aren't the type to seek a lot of attention.

HONORS: Page A13



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch Louis and Megan Schlegel, back, pose with five of their six kids Thursday at the Crow Wing County Fair after being named the 2021 Farm Family of the Year. The kids, from left, are Louis, Waylon, Stephanie, Arthur and Ben.

Dispatch to host live 'Ask the Editor' series

Ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes of the Dispatch newsroom? Or how the editors make decisions about coverage or story placement? What about the paywall or e-edition or podcasts? With a new monthly Facebook Live series titled "Ask The Editor," Dispatch leaders hope to connect with readers in a new way and increase transparency into how the reporters, photographers and editors gather and report the news.

Dispatch Editor Matt Erickson and Community Editor Chelsey Perkins will kick off the live series 3 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 12. The first installment will share how the newsroom is organized and what a typical day looks like for the team, from early morning planning to the final product's completion late at night, plus all the website and social media updating in between. "It's really a great opportunity

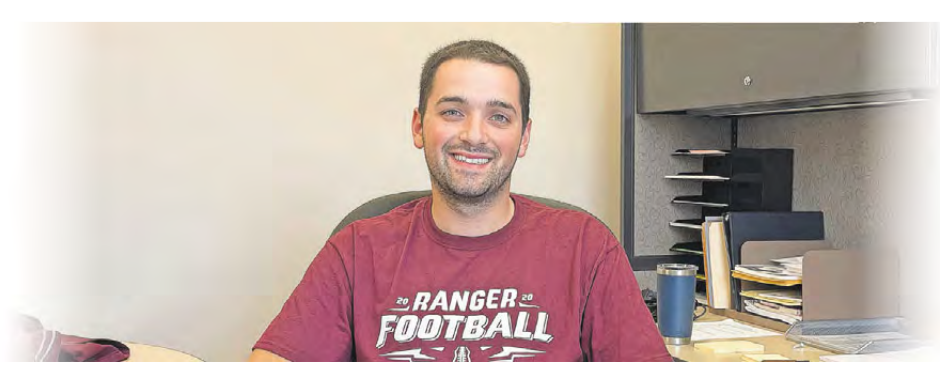
for us to chat directly with our readers, to give them a peek behind the curtain, so to speak, of how we put together the Dispatch each day," Erickson said. "If you've ever wondered how or why we do what we do, here's your chance to ask."

Perkins said the platform provides the opportunity to address misunderstandings about how the Dispatch newsroom functions.

ASK: Page A12

INSIDE TODAY VOL 141-098 DEATHS A5, A9 OPINION A6 CLASSIFIED D1-6 SPORTS B1-3 DEAR ABBY A7 BUSINESS C1-3 OUTDOORS B4 34246 00002 5

Athletics B1 Downing flying high to be at C-1



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ASK

From Page A1



Kelly Humphrey / Brainerd Dispatch

Brainerd Dispatch Editor Matt Erickson works at his desk in June in the Dispatch newsroom.

How to participate

The editors will answer live questions on news-related topics posted in the comments as well as those submitted ahead of time through a form available on this story at BrainerdDispatch.com. People may also submit questions by email at asktheeditor@brainerddispatch.com or by mail at Brainerd Dispatch, Attn: Ask The Editor, P.O. Box 974, Brainerd, MN 56401. Include your name and city along with a phone number for any follow-up questions. Phone numbers are not for publication.

Visit facebook.com/brainerddispatch to participate live or to view the recorded segment later. A recording of the conversation will also be shared as an episode of the "DispatchCast," one of two podcasts produced by the Dispatch newsroom.

"My hope with this new regular Facebook Live series is to increase our connection with both readers and non-readers in the Brainerd lakes area," Perkins said. "We care deeply about the place we call home, and I want our neighbors to see the commitment of our local news team to getting the story right, keeping our coverage relevant and maintaining balance and integrity in our work."



Perkins

"But I also want the community to know we're open to hearing their concerns and criticisms as well as explaining how and why we do what we do. I hope this series provides an opportunity for people to get to know our team and see the value in local journalism."

LAMF

From Page A1

"Last week, our season began with optimism and enthusiasm. We were confident in our return to live performances with the knowledge that all of our artists are vaccinated and 98% of ticket holders reported vaccination," Lykins wrote. "As research about COVID-19, its variants, and breakthrough cases continues to evolve, we have adjusted our safety plans including: a mask requirement for our artists and audience; daily rapid testing for all artists; and hiring a full-time COVID compliance officer to navigate, develop, and implement these changes."

"Unfortunately, two of our artists have tested positive for COVID."

"Therefore, it is with deep regret and with the safety of our LAMF community in mind that we must cancel all remaining activities of our

2021 season."

The festival, in its 12th season, performed its concert series in 2020 in an entirely virtual format. This year marked a return to in-person performances in a new performance space, Brainerd's Gichi-zibi Center for the Arts. Events were set to run through Aug. 22, and plans called for each event to be live-streamed as well for those unable or uncomfortable with attending in person.

Reached by phone Friday afternoon, Lykins said continuing the festival via livestream — even without live audiences — did not appear feasible, leading to the difficult decision to cancel.

"The connection of our organization and our musicians to this community has always been at the forefront of our minds when we prepare our season," Lykins said. "Our musicians stay with host families, they eat at local restaurants, they support local

businesses. And they do what everyone loves to do here in town, which is take advantage of what the Brainerd lakes area has to offer."

"Because of that, even if they were the only ones in the performance hall, there would still be risk. ... Also by having musicians all on stage at the same time, some of whom cannot wear a mask to carry out their craft, we can't ensure safety for those unmasked people, should someone be infected."

Lykins said with the festival in the midst of its season, some musicians were already in the area. Those who drove here were able to return home and quarantine. Others who arrived from more distant locales will stay in town under quarantine and will continue to be tested for a period of time, assuring negative results before any traveling.

The fast-changing science of what is known about the delta variant of

COVID-19 meant organizers were forced to pivot mid-festival, amid an already challenging environment in terms of a virus transmitted by air.

"We know that wearing a mask in public is incredibly important to stop the spread of the virus. For many of our musicians, wearing a mask while they perform is an option. However, for woodwinds, brass and singers, it's just not something that is feasible to do," Lykins said. "Because of that, and because of the nature of a live performance and the intimate connections made ... it would require even more protocols and significantly more time to address those concerns than we had this time on short notice."

In his email to patrons, Lykins noted the organization would continue to be transparent about the decision and any ongoing health concerns.

"We know this news raises a lot of questions, and we honor our com-

mitment to transparency by providing as many answers as we can when they are available," the email stated.

Lykins said the organization was already planning a robust winter performance season at the arts center, and it's likely many of the events planned as part of the summer festival will eventually make an appearance.

"We were incredibly proud of the season that we had come up with to perform this year. And we know that many of those highlights that we weren't able to do this year, will appear on programs in the coming years," Lykins said by phone.

Organizers have said the festival is one of the fastest-growing summer music festivals in the country, drawing 200 artists from the nation's best orchestras and opera companies each season. A typical season includes nearly a month of chamber music, orchestra, opera

and ballet produced in downtown Brainerd.

Each performance is free to attend and has donation-based admission. Lykins said in light of the cancellation, organizers are willing to work with patrons who made donations.

"Rather than charge for tickets, our organization makes its programs accessible to everyone by inviting attendees to make a donation instead of having a set fee," Lykins said. "This season, we know many generous patrons made a donation when they reserved their tickets. And it's those donations that help us continue on year after year, long into the future. ... This is obviously a difficult time for our organization, and the financial support of so many is crucial. But we understand and will handle all requests regarding donations."

CHELSEY PERKINS, community editor, may be reached at 218-855-5874 or chelsey.perkins@brainerddispatch.com. Follow on Twitter at twitter.com/DispatchChelsey.



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