

Pine Knot

News

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Friday, March 19, 2021

\$1.25

INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



Playoffs begin
Page 17



Catch a sunrise
Page 14



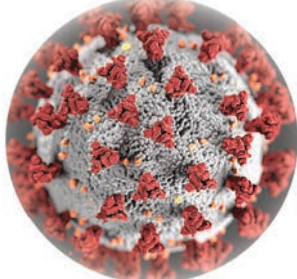
Halls fill up in Cloquet
Page 3

INDEX

- Weather 2
- News 3
- Opinion 6-7
- Obituaries 8
- Extra 9
- Community 13
- Puzzles 13
- Classifieds 15
- Sports 17
- Insert ... Tax Notices



A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER



Hitting the skids on Covid

For a year I've been begging Stockholm syndrome to kick in. To get used to the Covid-19 pandemic holding us hostage. Find a groove and take it through the murky tunnel. Find that a world turned upside down isn't so bad after all. Maybe even miss it once it ends.

KNOT PINING



Mike Creger

Fat chance. If you are like me, and many people I've spoken to in the past few weeks, the light at the end of this tunnel — shown with more access to vaccinations and tumbling case rates — is reason for hope.

But I am tired. Drained. I've hit the wall. I took a few days off this month and all I did was sleep, for 12 hours at a time. Then napping, then 12 more.

A normal year provides stress enough. A pandemic year just amplifies and complicates all of it. Child care. Elder care. Relationship care. Job care. It's all so taxing. This job of newspapering, of chronicling what is happening across Carlton County, has been excruciatingly difficult amid all those personal crises.

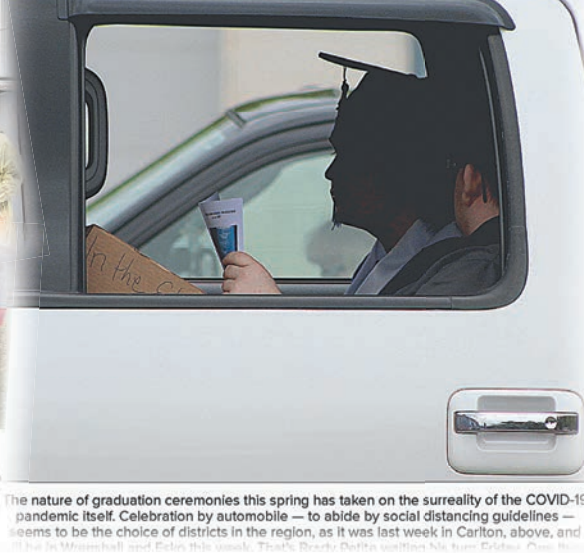
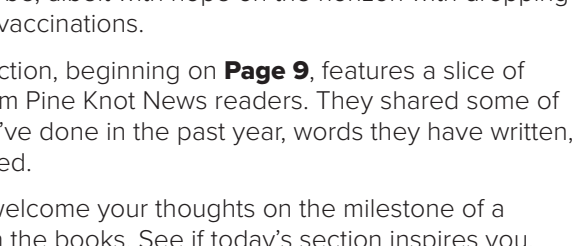
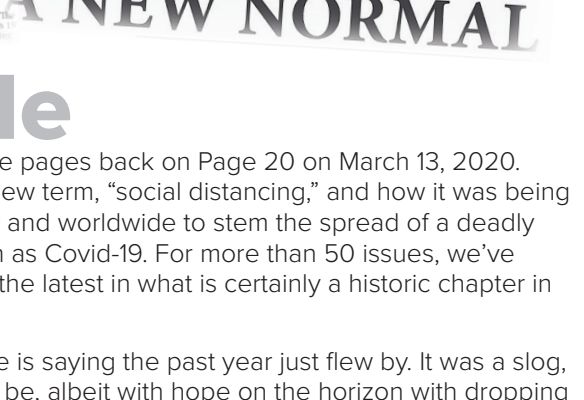
The death stories have haunted me. Trying to keep up with hourly changes in what we can and can't and should be doing has left us simply throwing our hands up in the air some days. Staff here have had to come in contact with the public and each other more than we wanted to, especially in the peak transmission times of last spring and fall.

Many particular joys of this job have been at ebb. The big stuff of town celebrations snuffed, the little stuff gone too. All the bright things we like to sew into this Pine Knot News quilt each week have been dimmed for more than a year.

We are still journalists, of course, and we have not shied away from the duty to provide readers with vital information. If there is one thing driving us through this pandemic, it is that thrumming responsibility. It has been a chore and a pride for us.

And there has been light. I recall the story about county musicians and their friends teaming up for a video song of hope.

Continued on Page 5



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CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

It's not normal, but closer

MPR News
mprnews.org

A year after they were put in place, Minnesota is easing back some of its Covid-19 restrictions, taking another step toward some semblance normalcy into the spring.

Gov. Tim Walz announced the new, more lenient restrictions March 12, citing strong vaccination progress and falling infection numbers.

Beginning this week, bars and restaurants are allowed to serve customers at 75-percent capacity. Salons, barber shops and churches won't have capacity limits at all, but will still be required to follow social distancing guidelines.

Small gatherings will be more open, as well, with groups of 50 people allowed to mingle outdoors, and groups of 15 indoors, with no limit on the number of households allowed to be represented.

"It's not over," Walz said. "We're not turning the dial all the way to 11. We are turning it up, though, to a point where normalcy is on the horizon."

Even large-event venues will expand capacity early next month — which means the Minnesota Twins will be allowed to host up to 10,000 fans at Target Field for their home opener in April.

There's a long list of specifics — and guidance

for individual circumstances and industries — on the state's website. Here's a quick overview:

- Social gatherings are expanded to allow up to 50 people outdoors and 15 people indoors — but the news here is that there is no longer a limit on how many households are allowed to participate. Social distancing between households, though, must be maintained.

- Places of worship and religious services like weddings and funerals no longer have a capacity limit, though masking and social distancing between households are still required. Food and drink also continue to be prohibited, "except when essential to perform a ritual or service." Singing will be allowed, as long as people are wearing masks.

- Businesses that provide personal services, like barber shops and tattoo parlors, no longer have a capacity limit, though social distancing is still required between groups.

- Gyms, fitness centers and indoor entertainment venues are open up to 50-percent capacity. On April 1, the current cap of 250 people will be removed. Indoor venues are subject to other capacity limits, depending on whether people are seated or moving around.

- Bars and restaurants are allowed to expand to

75-percent capacity — with a maximum of 250 people — for indoor and outdoor dining. On April 1, that 250-maximum cap drops. Patrons will still be required to be seated; tables must still be set six feet apart; bar seating continues to be limited to groups of four and table seating will still be limited to groups of six. And bars and restaurants must still be closed by 11 p.m., and can't reopen till 4 a.m.

- Larger outdoor venues, like Target Field, can open at 50-percent capacity, with a cap of 250 people. But by April 1, that capacity will be significantly increased, depending on whether people at the venue are seated — as in a stadium — or not. Social distancing and masks are still required, and venues will be prohibited from serving food or beverages between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m.

- The state has also outlined its updated guidelines for pools, swim parks, youth sports, reception spaces, large private events and working from home, which are in effect now or on April 1.

State health officials said they'll be watching infection rates — and will be tracking variants of the virus — closely over the next few weeks. If those rates continue to fall, Walz said he thinks it will be possible to ease restrictions further.

Covid skids ...

Continued from previous Page 1

The video splashed onto the internet as part of the "Song From the North Country" project. My toddler heard it a few times while I was prepping to interview producer Timothy Soden-Groves and others involved. She's a quick study, and soon the 2-year-old was singing the song acapella while going about her days.

On a nice summer evening, we strolled in Canal Park and came upon one of the musicians from the video performing an outdoor show. My daughter recognized her while dancing wildly out of synch to the folk tunes. During a break, she started singing that internet song. We approached the musician and I tried to explain — wondered if she would mind playing a bit of the song so a proud dad could show off his kid's talent. There was a little expected befuddlement. Then I simply asked my daughter to sing it. She demurred, of course. Dads should know better than to put a kid on the spot like that.

I slinked away while the kid skipped along.

A wry but bright memory. The kind that are quite the salve at just the right time.

When we asked for submissions from readers that might define in even the smallest way this year of all years, I didn't expect a flood. It's a big ask with so much swirling through us. But what we did receive was nice. Those minute things that help us cope.

Still, I am so mentally sapped. So ready for the simple act of lying on one's back in the grass and watching fireworks, or just fireflies, in a public park with no worry about distancing. Join with friends and strangers in the mixer called normal life.

I know you are ready as well. I try to muster pep talks to myself. And I feel a need to offer a public one as well to you, dear readers. But I can't. We are all in the same boat, rowing with noodle arms. Wits' end.

I have appreciated some bits of advice offered in the past year by people far more versed than I on the psychology we've experienced while pandemic living. It isn't cabin fever. And it certainly isn't something we should obligate ourselves to conquer. It's going to get all of us at



This now 3-year-old sings "Flood Waters" a lot. She goes down to bridges all the time, like the blue bridge in Duluth's Canal Park. The song's lyrics include: "Don't go down by the bridge. Stay up high on the ridge. Don't let those flood waters carry you away."

Mike Creger / Pine Knot News

different times, the experts warned. The key is to not think you have to achieve something superhuman despite the seeming time on our hands created by no longer being part of a social world.

If you didn't write that great American novel, deep clean a closet, write letters like it was 1820, catch on to communicating virtually, make someone's day more often, or just stay positive the past 365 days ... it's OK.

Sometimes we just shut down under overwhelming things. Breathe.

It will take time. Think of the Great Depression's impact on a generation, or world wars, or the 1918 fire and influenza outbreak. We take a big hit emotionally and shouldn't think we can just snap back.

At least I don't feel that way.

There will be normal, I know. But that will take more time than we'd like to admit, even when the last vaccine is injected or Covid-19 case is reported.

We go forward, things always do.

To avoid overthinking, I've turned to close listening of music lyrics the past year. Finding some new places they may take me.

That song from the "North Country" group is "Flood Waters," by Kate and Bill Isles. My child's continued singing of it every now and then reminds me to hold fast.

"There's a song you used to sing, before you lost everything. Don't let the flood waters take your song away." Mike Creger is a reporter and copy editor for the Pine Knot News.

Covid relief brings millions to area

Jana Peterson
news@pineknotnews.com

The \$1.9 trillion stimulus package passed last week by Congress and President Biden isn't only sending \$1,400 checks to many middle- to lower-income Americans, it also includes \$360 billion for state and local governments that have had to cut services due to budget shortfalls during the pandemic. Minnesota is expected to receive \$4.72 billion, with \$2.6 billion going directly to the state and \$2.1 billion going to local governments statewide. Another \$20 billion will be sent to tribal governments across the country.

Cloquet city administrator Tim Peterson updated Cloquet city council members during Tuesday's meeting, revealing that preliminary estimates show that the City of Cloquet would receive \$1.37 million dollars, with half received initially and half paid 12 months following receipt of the first payment.

This third round of stimulus is better in some ways for local government, he said.

"Many of the previous rules for this funding have been tweaked to better suit the needs of communi-

ties, residents and local businesses," Peterson told the Pine Knot News. "Utilizing funds for lost revenue opens up the funding received to reimburse lost sales tax and tourism tax dollars, and opens the possibility of addressing concerns local businesses have shared during the pandemic."

The period for submitting expenditures is much longer — Dec. 31, 2024 — than for previous Covid stimulus packages. "[That] allows the city time to review and decide a best strategy moving forward and address the long-term needs of the city, residents, and local businesses," Peterson said.

Carlton County Economic Development director Mary Finnegan said the county expects to receive just under \$7 million in two equal payments from the American Relief Plan: the first in mid-May and the second in March 2022. She said the county is still waiting to find out more about the terms of the stimulus package. Another round of business and non-profit grants could be forthcoming, the county EDA's Brenda Nyberg said last week.

Peterson said city staff would be putting together a list of suggested priorities and would be looking for

suggestions from the council in the coming weeks and months.

"Obviously this positive news is very recent, so we will be working very hard in the coming days and weeks to ensure we utilize these funds according to the laws and needs of our community," he said.

Individual stimulus checks are already being deposited in bank accounts around the country.

The IRS delayed the tax filing deadline by a month this week. The new deadline will be May 17.

With the original April 15 deadline less than a month away, there have been numerous last-minute changes to the tax laws because of the relief bill. One big change made the first \$10,200 in unemployment insurance collected in 2020 tax-exempt for many recipients.

The IRS had been under pressure to move the filing deadline by taxpayers and accountants.

Last year, the filing date was pushed back to July because of the coronavirus pandemic. The IRS, which has seen its budgets cut by Congress and its staff reduced in recent years, is still processing millions of paper returns from that year.

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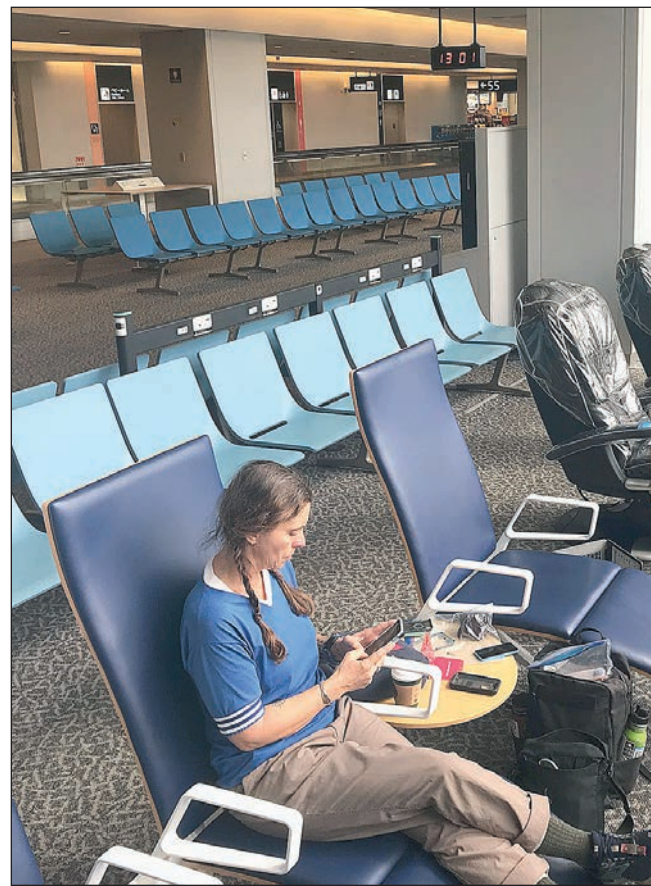
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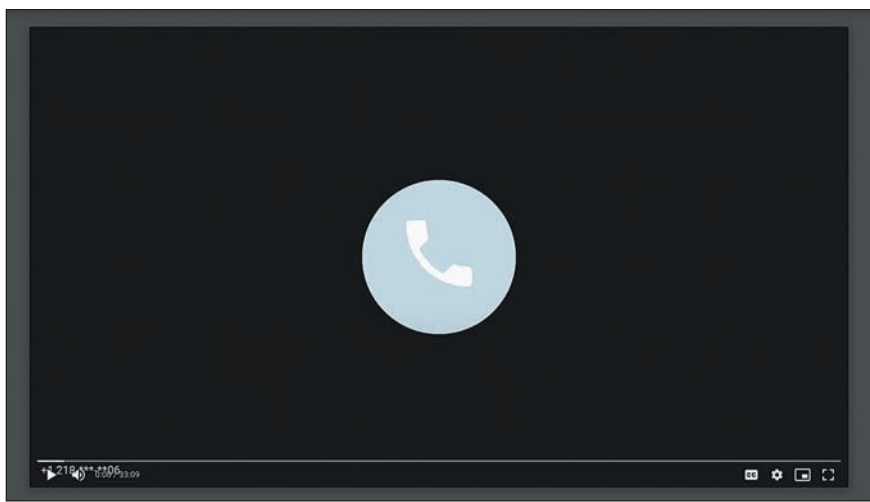
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You could almost hear a delirious giggle accompanying **Annette Christian's** email sent with an assortment of assembled jigsaw puzzles she and husband **Butch**, above, have done over the past many months under the Covid-19 pandemic at home in Cloquet. "Puzzles, puzzles and more puzzles," Annette wrote in all capital letters. **Steven Brown** of Minneapolis, a 1970 Cloquet High School graduate, says he's been creating artwork inspired by the pandemic. One work, above left, is called "Autumn in the Year of Covid." Another is "The Thaw After the Winter of Covid," bottom left. **Claire Persons** has also taken to the canvas "to help me cope with the pandemic." One of her works, at left, depicts a scene on the Brule River in Wisconsin, where she spent a February afternoon skiing near the fish hatchery. "There the river was open and lovely and I had to paint it." On Page 11, find a column from **John Hatcher**, who was forced to leave a university program in Vietnam with partner and Barnum farmer Heather-Marie Bloom, below, at an empty airport in Japan, and then quarantine in Minneapolis a year ago as the Covid-19 virus closed in.





Another meeting? Nooooooo

As someone who is going on his 13th month of working from home, I've attended so many Zoom meetings, Webex sessions and Google Meets that I've lost count. One thing that I have noticed is a whole new world of excuses. It's like the "dog ate my paper" crowd has grown up and become adults. Here is a list of some of the most common, along with the actual definitions.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Bruce Bock

Scheduling a Zoom meeting at 8 on a Monday morning. I haven't shaved or showered in two days, much less had time to find a clean shirt with a collar."

He said: "I need to make a call to the IT help desk this morning, so I may be joining in a bit late. Hopefully they'll be able to help me resolve my issues."

He meant: "IT blocked my number last week after my 38th call. I'm on hold with the superintendent of my kids' school, begging her to open up a classroom for my three kids. My wife gets called back to work at her office, leaving me in charge. Not a pretty picture. Since when did fifth-grade math become a foreign language?"

She said: "You'll have to excuse me, I seem to be having some kind of Covid fog this morning."

She meant: "I can't believe that it's taken me this long to discover the joys of day drinking."

Bruce Bock is from Wrenshall.

She said: "I'm so sorry, I'm having issues with our band width."

She meant: "I've got three kids and a spouse using every possible tablet, computer, phone and any other device that they can find, all at the same time. Seems like they also think that this new routine requires me to provide a hot lunch and to straighten up their workstations at the end of each day. And don't get me started on whose job it is to walk the dog."

He said: I'm so sorry, but I can't seem to get my video function to work this morning, so I'll be joining the meeting by phone."

He meant: "Are You Kidding Me?"

ONE LAST TRIP



Bobbie Turner of Cloquet shared what she was doing a year ago as the Covid-19 pandemic bore down. "My daughter, Erin, and I visited Las Vegas on her spring break from Minnesota State University Mankato last March. While we were there, we got news that her school, as well as most colleges around the country, was closing down. It was the last normal week before the world changed, but there were far less people there than a normal time. Not long after this, Vegas shutdown."

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Feeling grateful — and sad

I've read and listened to a lot of stories in the past week about "the moment" when people realized that the global pandemic was going to change their lives as they knew it. While we'd been living with the impact of the crisis for months, for me, everything changed within minutes after the group photo at right was taken a year ago.

I had just finished up another workshop at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City, where I was working as a visiting professor through the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program.

Instead of teaching journalism classes as I had been invited here to do, I was teaching my colleagues what I knew about how to teach classes online. I remember being so excited as the class ended. Through these workshops, I was meeting new people, exchanging ideas and making plans to visit classes and talk with students and faculty. This was why I'd come to Vietnam.

I walked out of the office and into sticky-hot air. I turned on my phone and a flood of messages came.

"Did you see the email? What are you going to do?" was the first message that caught my attention from a fellow Fulbright scholar.

I opened my email: "URGENT: Fulbright Voluntary Departure"

The message, from the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, had been sent to everyone in the Fulbright program in Vietnam: "We encourage all Fulbright grantees in Vietnam to make arrangements to voluntarily depart Vietnam as soon as possible."

Scholars in the program across the world received similar messages.

Two hours later, a flight was booked for Minnesota. Heather-Marie and I had three days to pack and say goodbye to all of our friends and neighbors.

We tried to do a few of our favorite

things before we left. We went to our yoga class. We went with another Fulbright scholar to the restaurant that President Barack Obama and First lady Michelle Obama ate at when they were in Vietnam years ago.

And we said goodbye to all the people we had met. On March 16, we boarded a plane bound for Japan and then on to the United States.

A few days later, we found ourselves quarantined in a vacation rental in a silent, empty downtown Minneapolis. We tried to figure out what to do. We had no place to live and no idea what our next move would be.

Life has worked out in ways we could never have imagined. I am aware that I enjoy great privilege and even some luck. The life Heather-Marie and Eleanor Roosevelt the Cat and I have just one year later is hard to imagine. I am a grandfather and a teacher and a writer and a farmer. I have more than anyone could ask for.

But a part of me will always be sad about the life that didn't happen. We still had four months left in Southeast Asia. Friends and family were planning to visit. I was going to meet with other journalism scholars and give a talk in China. We were going to fly to Australia to work with a journalism program there that was bringing Vietnamese students to their university.

Back home in Minnesota, I confessed to a friend that I felt guilty that I have so much in my life and yet still felt sadness. She said it is OK to feel both.

John Hatcher teaches journalism at the University of Minnesota Duluth and spends his summers helping partner Heather-Marie Bloom grow vegetables for her business, Rising Phoenix Community Farm in Barnum.

GUEST COMMENTARY



John Hatcher



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Agate hunt passes the time

Claire Persons spent hours agate hunting last summer. "It doesn't matter if the agate is tiny, pebble size or larger," she said. "There is great enjoyment in the hunt and discovery. She shared her finds by creating make necklaces, shown here.

She also wrote a poem about the rock hunt, which kept her mind off a pandemic world.

An Agate Hunt

Early during my morning rounds,

Walking along the gravelly grounds,
 I spy a sparkle of red orange hues,
 And naturally I stoop down for a closer view.

This tiny little chip often times missed,
 Through a layer of dew is revealed and sun kissed.

It shines boldly in the clear, morning light,
 I am most grateful to see this precious sight.

These sparkly chips help me to remember,

God's goodness and love are with me forever.



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Grocery Worker Appreciation vs Minot Minotauros
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Educator Appreciation vs St. Cloud Norsemen
 FRIDAY, APRIL 16TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15
 GET IN FREE WITH YOUR SCHOOL EMPLOYEE ID!

Thirsty Thursday vs St. Cloud Norsemen
 THURSDAY, APRIL 22ND - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15
 \$10 "ALL YOU CAN DRINK BEER" WRISTBANDS

Thirsty Thursday vs Minnesota Magicians
 THURSDAY, MAY 6TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15
 \$10 "ALL YOU CAN DRINK BEER" WRISTBANDS

Healthcare Appreciation and "Hockey Fights Cancer" vs Aberdeen Wings
 FRIDAY, MAY 7TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15
 SATURDAY, MAY 8TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15
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 FRIDAY, MAY 14TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15

Player Family Night vs Bismarck Bobcats
 SATURDAY, MAY 15TH - PUCK DROPS @ 7:15

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