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Bob Eastman, Page B1

Grand Forks Herald



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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

A 'balancing act' between life, virus

Alerus Center officials say big events carefully managed for safety

By Sam Easter
Grand Forks Herald

On Oct. 30, there was a wedding at Grand Forks' Alerus Center.

It was the worst day of the pandemic to that point in North Dakota, with 1,353 cases

reported statewide. Ten days earlier, the county's color-coded pandemic status moved to "red," or "severe risk." It was becoming unclear how much longer students would stay in public school; hospitals were already growing critically full, and within weeks, a leader at

Grafton's Unity Medical Center would tell the Herald a bed was set up in their chapel.

But on that day, Oct. 30, there was a wedding. Alerus Center planning documents, provided to the Herald on request, show a reception dance floor and 162 guests. A mayoral order

requiring masks at the center snapped into place days before the event — which appears to have made the event safer, since those documents had not called for wedding guests to wear them.

ALERUS: Page A9



Rosburg

Bochenski

Decision delayed in EGF hearing

By Hannah Shirley
Grand Forks Herald

No decision was made Friday afternoon, Dec. 18, in the state's lawsuit against Boardwalk Bar and Grill and its owner, Jane Moss, though the judge did extend the restraining order prohibiting the East Grand Forks establishment from allowing dine-in services until a judgment is issued.

Polk County District Judge Anne Marie Rasmussen heard arguments from both parties about whether an Executive Order prohibiting dine-in services at bars and restaurants is unconstitutional. She said before the arguments that she did not plan to make a decision on Friday, because she did not have time to review all of the court documents that were filed at the last minute.

The lawsuit was filed last week in Polk County District Court against the East Grand Forks restaurant by Attorney General Keith Ellison for violating Executive Order 20-99, which prohibits bars and restaurants from dine-in service. Shortly after the complaint was filed, a Polk County judge granted Ellison's request for a restraining order to keep the restaurant from allowing customers to eat on the premises.

When the restaurant last week refused to comply with the order, and opened for dine-in service that weekend,

HEARING: Page A7



Fishermen return to the dock at Ballard's Resort on Lake of the Woods after a day on the water in early October. Tourism on the south shore of Lake of the Woods rebounded after Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz lifted stay-at-home restrictions put into place during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and business was good throughout the summer.

Photo/ Eric Hylden, Grand Forks Herald

Tourism flourishes on south shore of Lake of the Woods while Northwest Angle struggles with border closure during pandemic

By Brad Dokken and Ann Bailey
Grand Forks Herald

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of the Herald's "On the border" project, which includes multiple stories and a three-part video documentary that can be found at www.grandforksherald.com.

The story of Lake of the Woods during the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways is a

tale of two lakes.

It's a story of winners and losers.

The winners can be found along the south shore of Lake of the Woods, where tourism flourished once Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz lifted stay-at-home restrictions in late May, and people began satisfying their appetites to get outside for a taste of normalcy — or

at least something resembling normalcy.

Like Lake of the Woods on a windy day, the season got off to a rocky start, but it rebounded nicely once the figurative waves settled, according to Joe Henry, executive director of Lake of the Woods Tourism.

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ON THE BORDER

The Herald spent time this fall traveling the northern border of northwest Minnesota to find how the pandemic and resulting U.S.-Canada border closure to nonessential travel is affecting business and everyday life. The series includes a three-part video documentary that is available to be viewed on grandforksherald.com, as well as three print stories, following this schedule:

- Today:** Life on the lake
- Dec. 26:** Border business
- Jan. 2:** Border life/hockey

No spring break for UMC students in 2021

Northland to begin online with lecture, theory courses

By Sydney Mook
Grand Forks Herald

In effort to limit extended student travel in the coming months, the University of Minnesota-Crookston will not have a spring break in 2021.

Chancellor Mary Holz-Clause said students will instead get multiple days off spread throughout the semester, rather than the typical entire week.

"We made that call early just

because we know students would want to get their airplane tickets or plan on that time off," she said. "Our spring break is in the middle of March and, unfortunately, I don't think we're going to be through this by then."

Crookston, like colleges across the country, sent students home during the spring semester earlier this year in an effort to keep COVID-19 cases away from the campus and the area. The students did not return fully to campus until this fall.

UMC: Page A7



Holz-Clause

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LAKE LIFE

From Page A1



Henry Colson

“People as a rule, they wanted to social-distance, they wanted to get out and be outdoors,” Henry said. “Fishing was a very popular sport, and they wanted to get out of the metro areas, so Lake of the Woods was a very natural destination.”

“So, consequently, on the south end of the lake, our resorts (did) quite well this summer.”

Herald reporters and photographers/ videographers traveled to Lancaster, Roseau, Warroad and the Lake of the Woods area in northwest Minnesota this fall to document the challenges the tourism industry and other businesses in the region have faced during the first eight months of the pandemic. What the Herald found is that some in the region have struggled, or had to adjust and adapt, due to the border closure. Meanwhile, some businesses there were seeing upticks in business as summer turned to autumn.

Tough times up north

The plot took a twist up at the Northwest Angle, that oddity of Minnesota geography surrounded on three sides by Canada and accessible from the U.S. only by crossing the lake. Thanks to the ongoing U.S.-Canada border closure to nonessential travel, getting to the Northwest Angle by road – which requires traveling about 40 miles through Manitoba – hasn’t been an option for anyone but permanent residents and essential workers since March.

As a result, the Angle – and its myriad scenic islands and sheltered bays – has only been reachable by crossing some 40 miles of windswept lake, a dangerous proposition for all but the most experienced boaters.

It’s even farther to reach resorts at Young’s Bay and Angle Inlet on the Northwest Angle mainland.

“We are a 100% tourism-based economy,” said Paul Colson, a third-generation owner of Jake’s Northwest Angle Resort on the Northwest Angle mainland with his wife, Karen. “That’s what we are, is all tourism, so we’ve essentially been on



Photos by Eric Hylden, Grand Forks Herald

Ed Arnesen, a Lake of the Woods County commissioner representing the Northwest Angle and owner of Arnesen’s Rocky Point Resort on the south shore of Lake of the Woods, talks about the summer season on the two sides of the lake in early October inside the resort’s Rock Harbor Lodge.

lockdown since March, when the Canadians closed the border to us.”

In a classic case of necessity being the mother of invention, plans are in place for an ice road this winter from Springsteel Resort near Warroad, Minn., to the Northwest Angle on a route that will follow both the lake and a trail cut through the trees on the U.S.-Canada border. That will help salvage the winter season, but without vehicle access all summer, it’s been a tough go for the dozen or so resorts on the mainland and nearby Flag and Oak islands.

“People are frustrated; they’re angry,” Colson said. “I feel like this summer was stolen from us.”

Caught in the middle

Efforts by Minnesota’s congressional delegation, including Rep. Collin Peterson and Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, among others, to reach out to Canadian government officials in hopes of allowing Angle-bound visitors to cross the border and access Manitoba roads, haven’t been successful, Lake of the Woods Tourism’s Henry said.

“The Northwest Angle is such a beautiful spot, but it’s caught between two countries, and it’s also caught between the politics of two countries,” Henry said. “I’ve been in close contact with many of our federal representatives, and they all have been reaching out to Canadian counterparts trying to create some kind of access, but nobody wants to touch it from Canada, and it certainly seems that nothing is going to change there for the time being.”

Jake’s Northwest Angle Resort didn’t have its first guests in camp until July 29, and the resort’s total lodging tax revenue for May, June and July was a mere \$2.25, Colson said. Lodging revenue from May through

September at the resort was down 83% from the same period in 2019, he said.

All because longtime guests with reservations on the books couldn’t drive to the resort.

“This would have been the best June I ever had in my life,” Colson said. “And now, I had zero people in May, June and almost all of July. I’ve had basically a week’s worth of business.”

As bad as that sounds, Colson says he and his wife at least are in a position to survive this year financially. Their three kids are grown up, and he only makes improvements to the resort when he has the capital to do so.

“We know our existence is pretty tenuous here, so that’s kind of built into our brains, and we don’t overextend,” Colson said. “So for us, I’m 50 years old. How much money does it take for me to generate to survive? Well, if I had three kids at home and was looking at them going to college and having a resort payment? Oh my goodness.

“I don’t know how you do it. I guess you have a really good relationship with your bank.”

Further frustration

Trying to get a firm answer from the Canada Border Services Agency on what constitutes essential travel has been equally frustrating, Colson says. As an example, Colson said he asked one CBSA official whether a mechanic could travel to the Angle to fix a vehicle and was told that would be essential.

Only to be told by another CBSA officer that it wasn’t.

The Herald on three occasions in October tried without success to reach the Northwest Angle. First, a Canadian border agent said travel by road wouldn’t be allowed because media weren’t deemed essential

and could do their work by phone or internet; wind and an early freeze-up prevented two efforts to get there by boat.

Meanwhile, a crew of workers was able to drive to the Angle to put in a dock at a private cabin just down from the resort, Colson said.

“We’ve learned the key words are ‘deemed essential,’ because I can’t even get a real answer on what’s essential,” Colson said. “Having a guy come in and put in a dock, is that essential? Hell no! Not in my mind.

“I keep saying, ‘Look, you show me the science that anybody’s ever been exposed (to COVID-19) by a passing vehicle,’” Colson said. “Essential travel for us is tourism.” It’s not like businesses at the Angle want the Canadian border to open, he says; all they’re asking for is right of transit.

“We just want Americans to be able to drive from America to America,” Colson said.



Gary Moeller, a partner in Ballard’s Resort near Baudette, Minn., fillets fish in early October after a day of guiding. The summer tourism season was solid for the resort on the south shore of Lake of the Woods but the resort’s Canadian camp on the Ontario side of the lake never opened because of the U.S.-Canada border closure.

Down, up, down

The tourism slump also has been apparent in Warroad, Minn., on the big lake’s southwestern shore. Sisters Janet Marvin, Robin Marvin and Randi Oftedahl saw business drop, rebound and drop again at Doc’s Harbor Inn nestled along the Warroad River.

The house where Dr. Leland S. Hughes, a veterinarian, once lived with his wife, Mildred, and their three children, besides hosting overnight stays, typically runs from 15 to 20 two-day sessions of summer camps for children ages 7 to 14.

The sisters held camps during the summers of 2017, 2018 and 2019. They canceled the 2020 camps because of concerns about spreading COVID-19.

“It hit us big because that was a huge summer income for us,” Janet Marvin said. “We also do nonmotorized boat rentals, and that was down.”

The number of guests staying at Doc’s Harbor Inn also was down this year, despite the sanitizing and safety

protocols Marvin and her sisters put in place. During the first six years, the inn, located just south of the state Highway 11 bridge over the Warroad River, was a popular place.

“We had a lot of people who came here for fishing excursions and weddings,” Marvin said. “The people that stay with us are coming for a gathering because we have the yard and the house.”

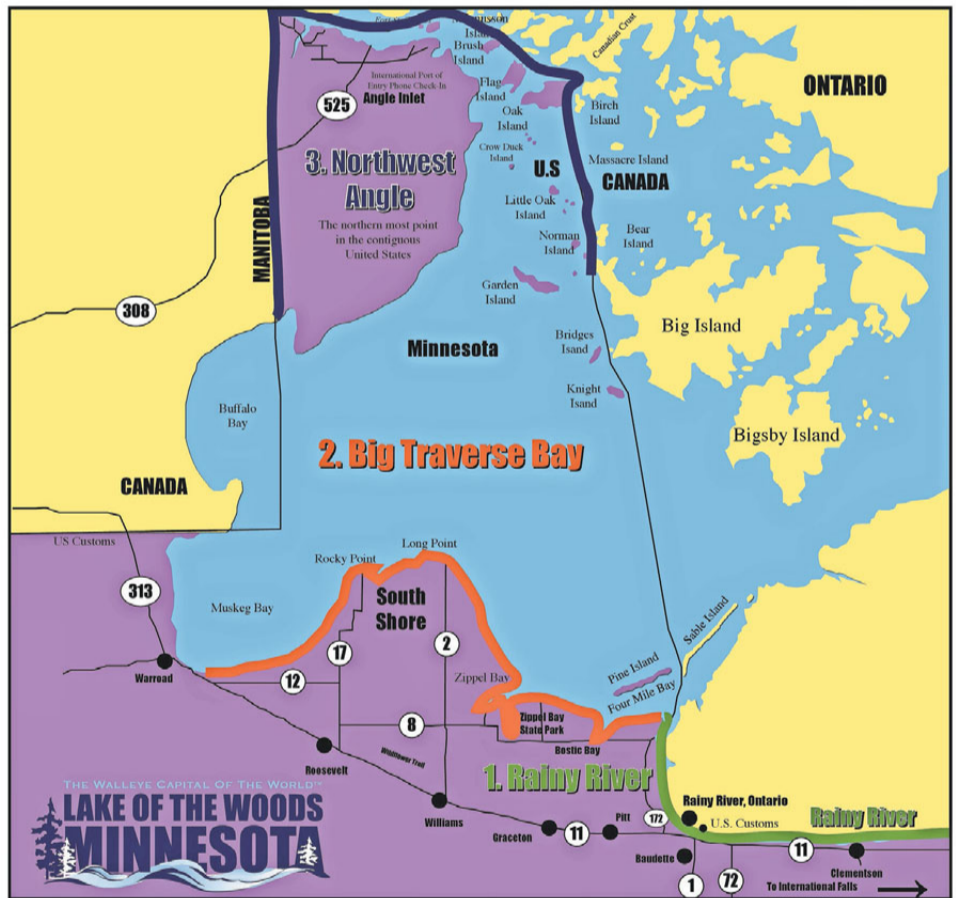
Because people couldn’t safely gather, events were canceled. That resulted in fewer bookings at the inn, she said.

Doc’s Harbor Inn was unable to receive any Payroll Protection Program money because it is too small to meet the criteria, Marvin said.

She and her sisters ran specials for the inn during October, such as staying two nights and getting the third night free, in an effort to attract business. They also reduced their per-night price by \$50 during November.

Still, since March, business at the inn has remained quiet.

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Map courtesy of Lake of the Woods Tourism Minnesota’s Northwest Angle, south shore and Rainy River, all destinations served by Lake of the Woods Tourism.



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UMC

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Holz-Clause said the days off will be spread throughout the semester because university leaders don't want students to take long four- or five-day weekends that allow them the chance to go home or other places.

"We know that it's much better if they just stay in one location," she said.

Classes are set to begin Jan. 11 on the Crookston campus and will likely look similar to this semester with a mix of hybrid, in-person and online learning, Holz-Clause said. Classroom capacities will likely be around 50% again, she said. Face covering requirements, social distancing measures and other mitigation measures will continue to be in place in the spring semester.

"We anticipate that spring will look very much like fall did for us," Holz-Clause said.

Though testing won't be required prior to the start of the semester, UMC is asking students to be tested before they come back to campus, especially since they will be fewer than 14 days removed from New Year's Eve, when

many gatherings occur, she said.

The campus will have an additional residence hall open to help lower the population density, Holz-Clause said. Students will be able to sign up for a single room, if they want it. Move-in times will be staggered.

Athletics competitions will be starting up again, but without fans, Holz-Clause said. The games will be live-streamed. Athletes will be tested three times a week, including before games, with rapid tests, Holz-Clause said. At present, athletes are being tested once a week, but as a part of conference protocols there will be more testing.

Other Minnesota colleges also are planning their return to campus for the spring semester.

Northland Community and Technical College, with campuses in East Grand Forks and Thief River Falls, says it will begin the semester with remote instruction in lecture and theory-based courses. Those classes will be offered online and may include real-time virtual lectures. Programs requiring hands-on lab components that cannot be replaced with virtual instruction or simulation, such as Northland's trades

and health programs, will be held on campus, exercising social distancing protocols to ensure safety.

The college said that programs were asked to plan for a flexible model to adjust to demands to ensure safety during the pandemic.

"Northland's faculty have had years of experience with online instruction," Brian Huschle, Northland Provost, said in a statement. "We have been leaders within the Minnesota State System and region in online education, and more recently leaders for 'hyflex' pedagogy, with several programs moving to this type of instruction – one that allows students to shift from online or remote to in-person instruction – even prior to the pandemic."

When the pandemic's impact in the region improves, NCTC will return with "limited lecture-based instruction to allow for in-person participation on our campuses as an option for students."

Northland says it will continue offering student services both in-person and online. Academic advisers and other student service professionals are making appointments available through several modes of delivery.

HEARING

From Page A1

the state suspended its liquor license for 60 days with a threat of a five-year suspension if ownership continued to be noncompliant.

On Dec. 14, the Boardwalk Bar and Grill Facebook page was updated to reflect that the restaurant would be closed "pending a court appearance."

Marshall Tanick, a Minneapolis attorney representing Boardwalk, argued that by enacting a unilateral shutdown without seeking legislative approval, Gov. Tim Walz unlawfully deprived restaurants from their constitutional rights. But Jason Pleggenkuhle, who represents the attorney general, said the defendants did "not even come close" to meeting the threshold for arguing that Walz's actions were unconstitutional.

Ramsey County District Court dismissed a similar case brought forward by the Free Minnesota Small Business Coalition in September.

Tanick also argued that it's unfair to restaurants and bars to be closed while retail stores and other establishments are allowed to remain open.

But the state said the gov-

ernor's recommendation was data-based. The Minnesota Health Department has found that in retail stores – in which masked customers have only brief encounters with others – there has been minimal COVID-19 transmission. The same goes for beauty appointments, which include one-on-one interactions with various implemented safety standards, according to the state.

Bars and restaurants, where many people tend to congregate for long periods of time without masks, have resulted in significant community spread, Pleggenkuhle said, second only to nursing homes for the number of outbreaks in the state.

The Minnesota Department of Health has identified 448 outbreaks at Minnesota bars and restaurants, resulting in 4,145 confirmed positive cases, and likely many more secondary infections, Pleggenkuhle said.

"The state takes no joy in having to bring an action like this, and the state understands it's a difficult time for businesses right now," he said. "But choosing to reopen for on-premises dining in violation of executive order 20-99 dangerous to public health and safety, and is unlawful."

The Herald's Adam Kurtz contributed to this report.

LAKE LIFE

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"We didn't have anyone in March, April, May," Marvin said. Business picked up during the summer "when people wanted to get out," she said. However, this fall, business slowed again.

"I think people are a little unsettled now," Marvin said in late October.

'Frustrated to desperate'

That unsettled mindset also lingers up at the Northwest Angle. Ed Arnesen, a Lake of the Woods County commissioner who represents the Northwest Angle – "the most northerly district in the United States other than Alaska," he says – describes the mood among business owners up at the Angle as "frustrated to desperate."

"It seems like the farther west you go in Angle Inlet, the worse it gets," Arnesen said. "Distance-wise, it's just hard for people to get up there across the big lake with smaller boats. A lot of the people that fish up there have smaller boats than we do on the south end of the lake because they usually trailer them up, and it's more protected water."

"So, it's kind of a double-whammy for them."

Arnesen, a third-generation resident of the Rocky Point area and owner of Arnesen's Rocky Point Resort north of Roosevelt, Minn., said the resort on the south shore of Lake of the Woods had to shut down its busy winter season two weeks early when the pandemic descended in mid-March and didn't reopen until June 10.

After that, people flocked to the south shore of the big lake.

"The summer was good on this side of the lake – very busy," Arnesen said. "I think on the south end of the lake, it's been busier than normal. Unfortunately, on the Northwest Angle and Islands, it's been slower because of the border restrictions."

Pulling the plug

It's been even tougher for operators who own fishing camps in Canada. Gary Moeller and Nick Anthony, partners in Ballard's

Resort near Baudette, Minn., also own Ballard's Black Island, a fishing camp on the Ontario side of Lake of the Woods.

The owners of the camp, which relies exclusively on American tourists, decided to cancel the season in July when it became apparent there would be no end to the border closure extensions, which continue to be implemented a few weeks at a time.

"It was super frustrating for us, not knowing," Moeller said. "Obviously, they're dealing with the entire border, but to just continue to extend it a few weeks at a time and a few weeks at a time and a few weeks at a time just created a scheduling nightmare for us."

"You're on the phone nonstop, people always wanting to know, 'What have you heard? What do you know? What's going on?' And we never had an answer for it. So finally, in July, we decided just to call it. It was fairly predictable at that point."

Neither Moeller nor Anthony have been to the Ontario camp since the border closed but have Canadian contacts who mowed the lawn and kept an eye on the place. Crossing into Canada would have required filling out "a 40-page document or something like that," Anthony said, along with spending 14 days in quarantine.

"Quite honestly, we haven't even looked at it," Anthony said. Not being able to offer the experience available on the Ontario side of the lake, which is drastically different from the open expanse of Minnesota waters, has been frustrating, he said.

At least, the partners say, they've had the American resort to fall back on during the border closure, and business on the south end of the lake has been brisk.

"It's unfortunate, overall, for all of northwest Ontario because we/they were receiving next to no support from the government at all," Moeller said. "It's as though northwest Ontario doesn't even exist right now, and it's super frustrating financially. We're obviously fortunate because we have another business that we can continue with, but a lot of our friends, that's their sole income."

"It's dire straits for a lot of them."

Summer surge

In some ways, Moeller said, the brisk traffic on the south shore of Lake of the Woods this past summer was a surprise.

"I think we had a feeling early on that with the border being closed, we'd see a surge of fishermen that just wanted to get out and go," Moeller said. "I think the biggest surprise for me was seeing the amount of resident fishermen that came up this summer."

Normally, Minnesota residents make up about 25% of the summer clientele at Ballard's, Moeller said. This year, 52% of the resort's summer reservations came from Minnesota.

"Actually, for me, it was nice to see so many families, (and) you just know the reason they're finally able to come to Lake of the Woods is because Timmy doesn't have Little League, and Suzie isn't in basketball camp somewhere," Moeller said. "They actually had time, and I think they wanted to stay in-state and they wanted to do something fun, and so, hopefully, maybe we'll get some long-term business out of the people that were from Minnesota but first-time ever to Lake of the Woods."

On the other end of the lake, Colson, of Jake's Northwest Angle, says he just wants his regular customers back.

"We've got a great clientele. I think we'll be fine," Colson said. "It depends on how long this goes on. When does this end? Are we talking this winter? Next summer – is that in jeopardy, too? Can you go a couple of years?"

Colson says he just wants to run a resort without the drama that's been thrust upon his and other businesses at the Northwest Angle because of Canada's border-crossing restrictions.

Boring, he said, would be a "nice baseline."

"You show me a map where everybody has just been clobbered," Colson said. "There is no place like this that's been hit this hard. I look around, and it's been all for nothing."

"The Northwest Angle is truly the burnt offering on the altar of COVID – there is no other way to say it."



Photo/ Sydney Mook, Grand Forks Herald

Situated near the mouth of the Warroad River, which flows into Lake of the Woods, Doc's Harbor Inn in Warroad, Minn., is named after Dr. Leland S. Hughes, a Warroad veterinarian who once lived in the house with his wife, Mildred, and their three children.



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