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MENTAL HEALTH ROCKS

Counties partner with daycares, farmers, and nursing homes to spread cheer, mental health awareness

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Often times, it's the little things that mean the most.

A new mental health awareness project run by the Public Health Departments of Le Sueur and Waseca Counties aims to use little rocks painted by area daycare children as both day-brighteners and regular, mental-health awareness reminders at local nursing homes.

"The purpose of this project is to connect our childcare kiddos with our elderly population and promote awareness to the importance of mental health—to promote the message that mental health isn't a weakness and that it's okay to get the help you need," stated Le Sueur County Community Health Coordinator Ashley Killday.

Fourteen daycares and five nursing homes in Le Sueur and Waseca Counties are participating in the Mental Health Rocks program.

"A lot of daycares and senior centers have jumped on board to participate in this project," stated Waseca County Community Health Educator/Planner Colin Ayers. "Public Health did not have anyone refuse to participate in this project. It is reassuring to know that a



Lisa Ingebrand Photos

Children at Little Wonders Childcare in Waterville paint rocks to be distributed to nursing homes as part of Le Sueur and Waseca Counties' new "Mental Health Rocks" program. Pictured (left to right): Brody Miller and Morgan Miller paint rocks under the watchful eye of their little brother, Owen.

lot of people are willing to hop on board and address mental health awareness."

The children at Brenda Novack's Little Wonders Childcare in Waterville painted their rocks in the morning sunshine on July

13. Two-year-old Wyatt Page had fun painting his rock—and himself—green.

"He loves John Deere tractors, so I'm not surprised he picked green," laughed Novack as she wiped paint from

the little boy's nose. "Everyone is excited to paint."

Prior to pulling out the paint and letting the kids pick out their rocks, Novack spent time explaining the purpose of the project to the kids. "I told them that

there are some grandmas and grandpas in nursing homes that could use some cheering up, so we're going to paint rocks for them to make them smile," she shared.

Rocks to 8

Cedar Circle project bids rejected

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Bids were received by the Waterville City Council for the Cedar Circle Improvement Project in Waterville and were opened July 1. There were a total of five bids for the project.

James Bros. Construction of Elysian submitted the low bid of \$393,939.15, which was approximately three thousand dollars less than the bid of W.W. Blacktopping (\$397,010.50). The engineer's estimate for the project was \$354,094.00.

A total of 14 parcels are included in this project which will include sanitary sewer (new and repaired), water-main, storm sewer, and street and site work.

Because the bid prices were substantially more than the engineer's estimate, the council decided to reject all bids and table this project until January.

The council said they may look at separating the project into a couple of different phases, but this won't happen until early next year.

In other Waterville City Council business from their July 12 meeting:

- Le Sueur County will pay the City of Waterville \$27,557.67 in a municipal Council to 2

WEM honored for top-notch PBIS work

Local district one of two in state to receive specific honor

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The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) recognized 51 public schools and seven school districts for their successful work using Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), a data-driven program that provides schools and districts with training and support to promote positive student behavior, especially for students facing challenges inside and outside of the classroom.

This was an increase of six more school districts than in 2020-21.

Among those schools are two from this area. The Waterville-Elysian-Morristown 5-8 Junior High in Morristown, the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Elementary in Waterville, and Tri City United K-8 School in Le Center and they were both recognized as Sustaining Exemplar Cohort Schools.

The WEM School District is also one of only two districts being recognized as Progressing Toward Sustaining Implementation. The other school is Burnsville Public Schools.

To earn this honor, school districts are required to demonstrate capacity for coordination, training, coaching, and evaluation to support schools in their district to implement School-Wide Behavioral Interventions and Support.

Through evidence-based practices, this national program aims to make schools

more responsive to the cultures and communities they serve. One important area of focus for the program is on decreasing disparities in discipline, which have historically had negative impacts on educational outcomes for students of color, American Indian students and students with disabilities.

The schools receiving recognition are leaders in supporting positive behavior, improving school climate and increasing student achievement.

Since its launch in 2005, PBIS has spread across the state and is currently being implemented by 769 Minnesota schools, more than one-third of the state's nearly 2,000 public schools.

To establish a PBIS program, 80 percent of a school's teachers and staff need to agree to implement a more positive approach to discipline.

Participating schools then receive intensive professional development, including instruction in how to monitor and track results. Data from participating schools show clear evidence of success, specifically in reducing the number of behavioral incidents, fewer student suspensions and increased levels of student engagement.

To be identified as a Sustaining Exemplar School, staff needed to submit an application that documented their work with PBIS, including professional outcomes, a plan for sustaining the program, and how they are giving back and sharing their practices with other schools throughout Minnesota. Schools must also have been implementing PBIS for at least three years.

Thayer wins State Legion Aux. Award

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Elysian resident Edna Thayer has been selected as the Department of Minnesota Unit Member of the Year for 2022 at the American Legion Auxiliary Department Convention held in Willmar on Thursday, July 14.

"I am very honored and humble because there are many members in the state who do so much and deserve this award," Thayer said.

The Unit Member of the Year award recognizes an individual who is a very special, hard working, dedicated Auxiliary member who goes above and beyond the call of duty, however has no desire to serve in any office beyond unit level. She works behind the scenes and is there to further the programs of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Sharon Brandt of Elysian was the recipient of this award last year and this is the first time individuals from the same community have received this honor.

Criteria to be selected include the nominee being an adult unit member of the American Legion Auxiliary who is not in an elected or appointed leadership role higher than unit president.

A narrative of 1,000 words or less describing the nominee's accomplishments and



Submitted Photo

Edna Thayer is pictured in front of Mary Efta, MN Department Leadership Program Chair, who presented Thayer with the Legion Auxiliary Unit Member of the Year Award and Patti Coleman, MN Department ALA President.

activities also need to be submitted.

There are 421 Auxiliary units in Minnesota and 26,940 members.

Thayer has been a very active member of Auxiliary

Unit 311 for the past 25 years.

In her nomination letter which was presented by Unit 311 President Lanette Ayers and Unit 311 Member Joan Markytan, they said Thayer has been a great asset for the Auxiliary as both the history chairperson and the parliamentarian for years.

She has put together a compilation of details for unit scrapbooks. She advises the unit on parliamentary issues, mentors, new positions, sends care packages to Veterans in Services, and donates much time and money to the groups for their projects.

Thayer belonged to a group in Mankato called Champ Wings for many years, working with them filling boxes and sending them to veterans. They recently folded but Thayer continues to send her list of veterans on her own.

Starting for the 2021-2022 year, a new Unit 311 Chair-

man position was created for Thayer by Brandt - Chairpersons' Advisor to Records and Reports. In this role Thayer meets with the program chairs answering their questions and advises them on how to fill out the many forms and award applications within their program.

"Her abilities are endless and always open to help out wherever needed," Markytan and Ayers wrote. "She has been cashier, selling desserts, and working bake sales at functions at our Legion for years. She has many skills and is a very clever person and is deserving of this honor."

Thayer will now represent the State of Minnesota as the MN Unit Member of the Year at the National Legion Convention in Milwaukee August 26 through 31.

Auxiliary to 2



Submitted Photo

Pictured with Department of the Year honoree Edna Thayer were members of the Elysian American Legion Auxiliary Unit during the State Convention held July 14 in Willmar. Left to right: Kelly Kauss, Jan Evans, Joan Markytan, Edna Thayer, and Bonnie Walton.

