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Rural Kerkhoven butchers find niche in halal-certified goat meat

by Cormac Dodd

All of the goat meat on the shelves in Willmar's ethnic stores is imported, the majority of it from Australia and New Zealand. The vast majority of halal-certified meat in general is imported--Halal-certified meaning a product is consistent with Islamic Law--and much of it arrives to stores frozen after several months of frozen-packaged transportation.

That will change Wednesday when Georgia Gallardo and Tomas Zalldizar, owners

of Kerkhoven Country Butcher, begin processing goat meat for Willmar farmer Tiffany Farrier, who will deliver fresh goat meat to four ethnic stores in downtown Willmar in a manner consistent with halal standards.

"This will offer a product that has not before been offered here. This has not been done here in Willmar that we're aware of--selling halal processed meat directly to customers," Farrier said.

"There has been a surging demand for meat in the Somali stores," said Justice Walker of

the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission.

The goat meat in Willmar is brought in from other areas, primarily outside of the country, due to a lack of goat meat processors in the state of Minnesota willing to process goat on a commercial scale.

Most of the meat has not been of high quality, and the Somali communities in Willmar and St. Cloud have identified this as an issue of food sustainability.

Halal goat meat is the equivalent of communion for Somali Muslims, a staple food rather than a specialty one, remaining a consequential part of ethnic cuisine.

Adbiweli Yusuf is the owner of Amin Grocery, a Somali store located in downtown Willmar. "We're excited to have fresh goat meat in the community for the first time," he said. "I've been desperate for fresh meat for decades, since I opened this shop."

As a store owner, Yusuf does not have the time to raise or butcher goats, and he is thankful to the community members--Farrier and Walker specifically--who made the project possible. Yusuf mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the store and led him to again recognize the importance of locally produced products.

Shipments from overseas



Kerkhoven Country Butcher really is in the country... located a mile or so outside of town on 145th Avenue SE.



Country Butchers owners Tomas Zalldizar (left) and Georgia Gallardo, along with employee Elizan Gomez, posed in front of their shop located just south of Kerkhoven on a farmsite owned by Doug Finstrom.

ran slow, arriving late, and in his case, he was waiting on goat meat from Australia, New Zealand, or Switzerland. "This will give our communities

fond memories of life back home," Yusuf said.

Opened in 2020

The Kerkhoven Country

Butcher opened shop last year on the outskirts of town, at the end of a long gravel driveway surrounded by corn. Georgia

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KMS Board follows suit in endorsing Trailblazers' plan

by Ted Almen

As had earlier happened at both the Swift County Board of Commissioners meeting and the Kerkhoven City Council meeting, representatives of the "Trailblazers" group met with the KMS Board of Education, at its monthly meeting held last week Monday.

The Trailblazers is a volunteer organization which has been working for three years to establish a paved walking and biking trail between the cities of Kerkhoven and Murdock. Representing the group before the KMS Board were Dave and Terri Barrett, Alison Nelson and Patti Cain. Also there in support of the Trailblazers was Mike Amborn, an engineer working on the trail project.

Essentially, the Trailblazers were asking each governmental entity the same thing... to support a letter of intent to apply for a TAP grant (Transportation Alternatives Program) which could provide funding to help pay for Phase I of a three part trail plan. Phase I is the beginning of the trail starting at Pillsbury Park in Kerkhoven, running the length of the city to 15th Street, then traveling north on 15th one block to Idaho Avenue where it would turn west onto KMS property and traveling parallel to 90th St. SE (the golf course road) until it came to the clubhouse, then making a slight jog onto the side of the golf course all the way to the west ballfield.

Of all that, the lion's share of the trail would be on city streets, with new paint marking the pathway. Only when it reached Idaho Avenue and turned onto KMS land would

a paved surface need to be installed.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is making \$6.2 million available in the form of grants for Greater Minnesota projects. Of that, Dave Barrett said District 4, which encompasses this area, will receive \$700,000. He told the board of education that the Trailblazers are confident they will have a very competitive application for some of these funds.

Barrett further reminded the board that in 2019 their group had asked, and were granted, letters of support of a National Park Service grant which they successfully received. That money has paid for technical assistance which has helped get the effort to this point.

A TAP grant would come in the form of an 80-20 match. In other words for every dollar, 80 cents would be granted while the local entity would contribute 20 cents. TAP grant money can only be used for construction purposes, and Swift County has agreed to act as the fiscal agent for any grant money.

Referring to a handout at the meeting, Dave Barrett cited the projected construction costs for Phase I to be \$221,249.75. Added to that would be surveying, design engineering, and construction engineering and administration costs totalling an approximate \$53,000.

The local obligation would therefore be \$53,000 plus 20 percent of the construction cost... in this case some over \$44,000, for a total of \$97,249.95.

The other two phases would be a similar route in

Murdock, and then the largest chunk of the project being the four-mile distance between the two towns.

Amborn noted that while the city streets would be utilized in Kerkhoven, with clear designation by a painted lane, the new hard surface would be 10' wide bituminous. If the Trailblazers were able to secure the TAP grant, construction would take place in 2026. That brought the question: Why so far out?

"It seems like a long time to wait," said board member Harmon Wilts.

There was no argument there. Terri Barrett said that what they have heard is that trail projects typically take seven to 10 years from start to finish, although Amborn said sometimes there are ways to move that timeline ahead.

Another possible impediment was any future use the school district might have for the land behind the high school, and Wilts asked that the Trailblazers coordinate efforts with KMS. To that, Dave Barrett said the trail committee was flexible as to siting of the project.

Other aspects of the trail plan that were mentioned:

•Terri Barrett said 1500 community surveys had been mailed out, with a very good response of 336 returned. Of those, 95 percent expressed their opinions that a trail would have a positive community impact. As it is now, people who like to walk or bike on trails are leaving the community to do so. "They take their money with them," noted Terri Barrett.

•A trail could lead to more than just walking and biking.

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Mexican folk dancers in their brightly colored costumes waited their turn to perform at last month's welcome event held in Kerkhoven's Pillsbury Park. See page 4 for story.

COVID-19 protocols at KMS

by Cormac Dodd

The elementary school in Murdock had approximately 150 COVID-19 cases during the 2020-2021 school year, compared to the 35 COVID-19 cases confirmed in the month of September alone, between the middle school and the high school.

"There have been more cases at the elementary school," said superintendent Martin Heidelberg. "This year, we've had more COVID-activity and positive cases early on."

Educators and administrators across the country have called September a difficult

month, perhaps the most difficult yet. COVID-19 cases have not been so high in the state of Minnesota for nearly a year as in late September and early October. The same could be said of Swift County on October 6th, when 81 cases were confirmed in the county. The following day, on October 7th, Swift County had 91 confirmed cases, adding 10 cases.

But cases numbers have fallen again in mid-October, down to 45 confirmed cases in the county on Wednesday. Administrators have seen trends in county case numbers reflected in schools.

At least three COVID-19 plans have been introduced

in the district's schools since spring of 2020. The first was a state-wide lockdown in which the elementary school went to paper-and-pencil learning at a distance, from March to June.

The district is now into its third and least restrictive plan.

The second was a thick packet distributed to parents--detailed, defining what COVID-19 would be in hypothetical instances and throughout the school day.

This document--bearing the title Safe Learning Plans and Instructional Models, Fall 2020-2021--was what the elementary school in Murdock ran for 173 days.

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