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Austin Daily Herald

WEEKEND EDITION



Inside: Austin's Walker leading Austin's offense.

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Saturday, October 23, 2021

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Tom Cotter reaches in for a handful of hemp seeds Thursday afternoon. Cotter planted 50 acres of industrial hemp this year in a move he hope will help environmentally. Photos by Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

Union members vote to merge Local 663 and Local 9

By Eric Johnson
eric.johnson@austindailyherald.com

It was announced Friday, that UFCW Local 9 in Austin will be merging with United Food & Commercial Workers Local 663 following a union members vote Thursday.

The merger will bring the total number of members to 17,000 and will provide a stronger base for those the two organizations represent.

"We're going to be the biggest packing house in the state of Minnesota and the biggest UFCW in the five state area," said Local 9 President Richard Morgan. "There's strength in numbers and working with Matt (Utecht, Local 663) and Michael (Potter, Local 663) and myself, that's well over 60-some years of experience."

A majority of Local 9's members work in the meatpacking industry with the largest employers being Hormel Foods and Quality Pork Processing; however, some union members work in food processing and various municipalities throughout southeastern Minnesota.

UFCW Local 663's membership is made up of workers in the grocery industry, meatpacking, healthcare and retail statewide.

See **UNION**, Page 8A

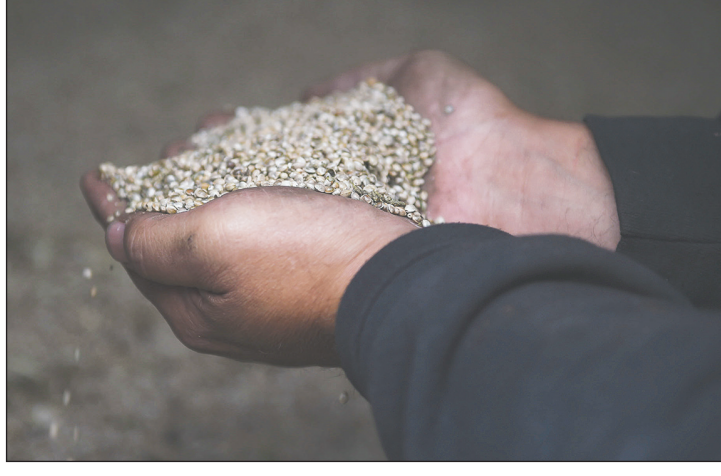
Diversity in agriculture

Local farm continues growth through hemp

By Eric Johnson
eric.johnson@austindailyherald.com

For a number of years now, local farmer Tom Cotter has been on the forefront of sustainable farming methods that are environmentally friendly. He's also gone with two others in the area — Jeff Brinkman and Marty Tebay — in bringing Superior Cannabis to life in Austin off their own growth of hemp for CBD oils.

Now Cotter is experimenting anew, this time on the industrial hemp side of things. This past season, Cotter devoted 50 acres of land to growing hemp in an effort not only to tap into a plant that is proven



Cotter holds a handful of seeds.

to be environmentally friendly, but also has an array of benefits from being included in plastics, rope and synthetic oils.

"If you're going to change the world, if we're going to help fight climate change, I think this is the way to go," Cotter said from his farm Wednesday

afternoon.

Hemp is largely underutilized in the United States, in large part because of the mistaken comparison to the marijuana plant, which is in the same family. However, hemp does not have the same qualities of marijuana and is not a recreational drug.

Nevertheless, because of the association, hemp was at one point prohibited from being grown by farmers, despite the good the plant does and its many uses.

For starters, it's incredibly weed resistant.

"I watch those plants that's out-competing any weeds out there," Cotter said. "If we can reduce chemicals in the countryside, that's a win-win."

See **HEMP**, Page 11A

Man sentenced to prison for sexually abusing teen

By Michael Stoll
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Abraham Palma Hernandez, 50, of Austin was sentenced on Thursday in Mower County District Court to 172 months in the Minnesota Correctional Facility in St. Cloud for felony first-degree criminal sexual conduct — penetration — victim under 16 — significant relationship — multiple acts. He received credit for 589 days served.

Two additional charges of felony first-degree criminal sexual conduct — penetration — victim under 16 — significant relationship — multiple acts, along with three counts of felony first-degree criminal sexual conduct — penetration — victim under 16 — significant relationship — force/coercion — and six counts of felony third-degree criminal sexual conduct — force/coercion — were dismissed at the sentencing as part of a plea agreement reached on Aug. 23.

Judge Christa M. Daily issued the sentence.

Court documents state that an adult woman reported to police that Hernandez, who was known to her, began sexually abusing her starting when she was about 13 or 14 years old.

See **HERNANDEZ**, Page 8A



Keep safety in mind this coming Halloween

By Michael Stoll
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With Halloween just around the corner, officials are hoping participants will keep safety in mind.

According to Austin Police Capt. Todd Clennon, pedestrian vs. car accidents are one of the most common causes of injury on Halloween.

"Make sure all participants are clearly visible and aware of their surroundings," Clennon said. "Try to avoid heavily traveled roads, and if you are driving, pay special attention for trick or treaters and slow down. Reflec-

tive tape, glow sticks, and battery powered flashlights will greatly increase visibility for pedestrians."

Clennon encourages trick or treaters to note if a house's porch light is on.

"Make sure all participants are clearly visible and aware of their surroundings,"

Capt. Todd Clennon

"In Austin, as most places, a porch light being on indicates a homeowner's willingness to participate on Halloween," he said. "If a front light or porch light is not on, please respect the homeowner's property and decision to not participate."

light is not on, please respect the homeowner's property and decision to not participate."

See **HALLOWEEN**, Page 8A



Trick or Treaters took to downtown Austin in 2019. Herald file photo

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Austin Winter Extravaganza returning for second year

Austin Daily Herald
newsroom@austindailyherald.com

The Austin Area Chamber of Commerce announced on Friday that the Austin Winter Extravaganza will return this year.

This year's event will once again include a lighting contest as well as a visit from Santa, according to a press release from Austin Area Chamber of Commerce President Elaine Hansen.

The lighting contest will run Dec. 1-31 and will include res-



divisions and will include the People's Choice, Mayor's Choice and Clark Griswold awards. There is no cost to participate. Winners will be announced the first week of January.

Santa will visit the Mower County Fairgrounds from 4-8 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 3. Families are invited to drive through the fairgrounds, visit with Santa from their vehicle, and receive goody bags for the children. KAUS will be playing holiday music from 4-8 p.m.



Chart Your Course

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life.

~ James 1:12 ~

Teachers ask for virus protocols after student, staff deaths

Associated Press

ST. PAUL — Members of Minnesota's teachers union are calling on school leaders to do more to protect students and staff after the state Department of Health reported the first student death from COVID-19 this school year.

Health officials said the student and two staff members died last week. That increased the total number of school fatalities since the start of the pandemic to two students and 13 school employees, including five workers this year.

"Five school staff members and one student have

died of COVID-19 this school year and it's only October," Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota, said Thursday. "There is no excuse for any district leader to ignore the guidelines for masking, social distancing, quarantining and vaccinations set out by state

and federal public health authorities."

Specht also asked parents to reduce the risk "of another tragic death of a student" by having their teens vaccinated. About 85% of the nearly 12,000 school cases detected since mid-August have been among students.

Hemp: Shown it can clean up soil

From Page 1A

Many of Cotter's crops are grown organically, eliminating the need for pesticides and herbicides, which can often leak into groundwater.

The hardy plant has shown to be able to cope with selenium, which occurs naturally in the soil, and according to a 2018 Rolling Stone article, scientists planted hemp in fields surrounding Chernobyl in the 1990s, the site of the 1986 nuclear plant melt down.

It was shown that the plant could filter out harmful contaminants—including heavy metals such as lead, cadmium and nickel—from the soil.

This finding was confirmed by German researchers in 2001.

While these kinds of ground contaminants are not usually found in our area, there is a use for the potential to filter other things out of the soil and the air.

"Hemp is one of the best plants at capturing carbon," Cotter said. "There

are just so many assets to that plant, it's amazing."

While admitting he has researched hemp and the soil himself, SWCD soil scientist Steve Lawler said that the introduction of hemp into the planting rotation helps just on diversity alone.

"What encourages us is that hemp is a different crop," Lawler said. "We really encourage folks to be looking at other markets. It alters the biological sense of the soil. From the standpoint of crop diversity, it's great."

Lawler has worked with Cotter in the past, including Cotter's introduction of cover crops, sparing a piece of land for a year and letting it rejuvenate.

It's these kinds of things—using cover crops, growing diversely and growing organic—that allows an environment-first approach.

"When you only have a cash crop, then you kind of leave yourself open and your only defense is chemical," Lawler said. "If there's a blip in the technology or that technology

wears down, then nature will eventually get around that and we're back to what farmers used for eons—diversity."

However, the hurdle remains misconceptions of the plant. The last major crop of hemp in the United States was in the 1930s, before laws were enacted against all forms of hemp with the fear that they were all similar to the effects brought on by marijuana.

Only in recent years has there been somewhat of a return to the growing and use of hemp. Cotter said that the defense against misconceptions is education.

"Until people educate themselves, they just think they can't do that," Cotter said.

In Cotter's case, he is largely growing the plant for the seeds, in which there are several health benefits, including a source of protein and Omega-3 fatty acids.

Another problem, though, is the expense involved. There are very few plants in the state of Min-

nesota that can process the plant. Cotter needs to bring his harvested plants to Hemp Acres near Waconia—a two-hour, one-way trip.

Once facilities become more common, the expensive cost of growing hemp is bound to go down.

"We just need facilities out there," Cotter said, while also saying that growth will depend on the medical marijuana industry. "Even though that's not what I'm growing, the more that breaks through, the more that will help this."

In the meantime, Cotter will continue experimenting, with plans to grow his acres devoted to hemp from 50 to around 80 to a 100 acres next year, and it will walk hand-in-hand with improving the environment.

"There's a time where chemicals are needed and it does work for us," Cotter said. "But in the long run we want to make sure we're better for our environment. The hemp is really exciting. It's great stuff."

Sign up to the Austin Daily Herald E-News. Send an email to: enews@austindailyherald.com with 'ENEWS' in the subject line.

BINGO OH! HOLIDAY

The numbers will correspond with a day of the week. A Bing-Oh prize can not be claimed until that day. Prizes may only be claimed in person during regular Herald business hours; 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tuesday – Thursday and Friday 8:30 a.m. – Noon.

DAILY NUMBERS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23
0-75

MONDAY, OCTOBER 25
N-39

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 26
N-40

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THURSDAY, OCT. 28TH
1. Packers at Cardinals 7:20 pm

SUNDAY, OCT. 31ST
2. Bengals at Jets 12:00pm
3. Titans at Colts 12:00 pm
4. Rams at Texans 12:00 pm
5. Steelers at Browns 12:00 pm
6. Eagles at Lions 12:00 pm
7. 49ers at Bears 12:00 pm
8. Panthers at Falcons 12:00 pm
9. Dolphins at Bills 12:00 pm
10. Patriots at Chargers 3:05 pm
11. Jaguars at Seahawks 3:05 pm
12. Washington at Broncos 3:25 pm
13. Buccaneers at Saints 3:25 pm
14. Cowboys at Vikings 7:20 pm

MONDAY, NOV. 1ST
15. Giants at Chiefs 7:15 pm

Tiebreaker: Cowboys at Vikings

Total points scored _____

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Wed. • Chicken Alfredo	Sat. • Eggs Benedict
Sun. • Loaded Biscuits & Gravy	

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PIGSKIN RULES

- Circle the winning team from the games listed on this page. Unreadable entries will be disqualified. Incomplete, incorrect or unreadable entries will be disqualified immediately. Official Entry forms only. Photocopies or handwritten picks will not be accepted.
- \$25 in Herald Bucks will be awarded each week to the contestant who correctly predicts the outcome of the most games. Herald Bucks can only be used at these participating businesses.
- Be sure to pick the tie-breaker. In case of a tie the contestant with the correct prediction of the outcome of the tie-breaker game will be declared the winner. If there is still a tie, the contestant with the closest prediction of the combined points of the 2 teams playing will be declared the winner.
- Enter every week. Every contestant has an equal opportunity to win each week. Only one entry per person per week. Each family member is eligible to enter.
- Tie games count as losses.
- Entries must be postmarked by Wednesday and delivered with Friday's postal delivery or left at the Austin Daily Herald any time before 3 p.m. on Wednesday to be eligible for each week's contest.
- Employees of the Herald and their immediate families are not eligible to win.

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