

The Globe

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Fights delay graduation ceremony

Local police, school officials struggle to contain the violence

By Julie Buntjer
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — A series of physical fights broke out at the Learning Center Thursday, just prior to the scheduled start of the graduation ceremony meant to honor students in the class of 2022.

Law enforcement from the Worthington Police Department and the Nobles County Sheriff's Office, as well as school administrators and school staff, attempted to separate and contain the individuals involved.

Though at least one individual involved in the original scuffle exited the gym, which had been decorated and set up for the graduation, at least two additional altercations appeared to begin in the entryway area of the Learning Center, just outside the gym.

Video footage appears to show a man being subdued by law enforcement and a school official, as well as multiple other scuffles, involving several different individuals.

As of 3 p.m. Friday, the Worthington Police Department stated they did not have any new information regarding the incident and were still looking into the matter, though they anticipated charges being filed by next week.

It was not immediately clear who was instigating the violence and who was attempting to stop it, as multiple individuals grabbed loved ones and friends to try to keep them from becoming involved.

FIGHT: Page 7



Kari Lucin / The Globe

Graduates wait for their ceremony to begin on Thursday, May 26 at the Learning Center.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Record number of students graduate from Learning Center

By Kari Lucin
The Globe

Worthington

A record number of students graduated from the Learning Center Thursday, as a group gathered to celebrate the achievements of the class of 2022.

"Truthfully, our world can be a hard place, and you have to have a good heart, and a strong mind to make it anywhere," graduate Roxanna Esparza said in her speech to her fellow students. "And failing is so hard on some of us, and it's hard to get up, it's hard to give 100%

all the time.

"But when you have people that are willing to help you, that reach out to you, that do their best despite whatever is going on in their personal life, it says something," she continued. "It says a lot."

Esparza was one of two student speakers at Thursday's event. The other was Kailia Rosadakhom. Both students sought to honor the staff and teachers at the Learning Center and both looked to the future.

"With all of the ups and downs that have come along the way, we have all made it here tonight, sitting in

the same room, closing off this chapter of our lives, together," Rosadakhom said.

Because the Learning Center is so much smaller than Worthington High School, its graduation ceremonies differ from the typical, and usually feature an introduction, story or review of every student.

This year, there were 55 graduates — 42 of whom chose to participate in the ceremony — but four LC staff were still able to speak about each student briefly. They were Austin Peters-Smith, Jami Wahl, Sandy Torgerson and Caitlin Werder.

Then the two students spoke, followed by the presentation of diplomas.

Doug Brands, principal of the Learning Center, then presented the graduates to the crowd of well-wishers.

The class of 2020 did not get a graduation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Brands said, and last year's graduates had a slightly-restricted graduation ceremony. This group of students experienced the pandemic in full force, as classes became hybrid or distance learning courses and shifted.

GRADUATION: Page 6

City explores options around Blue Line Truck Stop annexation

By Emma McNamee
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — A proposal to annex the former Blue Line Truckstop and the approximately 116 surrounding acres into the city of Worthington was brought before the Worthington City Council during a special session on Wednesday.

Larry Potter, former

owner of Blue Line Travel Center and current owner of the surrounding acreage, proposed the two properties be annexed in order to get the truck stop connected to the city sewer and allow for future development of the area surrounding it.

Totalling approximately 125 acres of space along with Minnesota 60 and

property south of the airport, the proposed annexation area is part of the orderly annexation area with Lorain Township as designated by a 1972 agreement.

Potter and Brian Dreesen of Cooperative Energy Co., who purchased the Blue Line Travel Center, attended the meeting and explained that

they hoped to figure out a solution for the property's sewer system, as the drain field on the property nears the end of its prospective life.

Accessing the city's sanitary sewer would allow for further development of the area, and Worthington as a whole, according to Potter.

"If you want to develop

the city, this is a really good opportunity to start," he told City Council members. "I'm sure that that location would sell, especially with 60 getting busier all the time."

While city staff noted several issues with the proposed annexation, including the feasibility of connecting the prop-

erty to the city sewer system and concerns over creating an "island" of unconnected property, among other issues, City Councilwoman Amy Ernst argued that the city's approach should be to consider what would need to happen to find a solution.

OPTIONS: Page 7

Update: Ground Round closes its doors

By Kari Lucin
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — The Worthington Ground Round is closing for good, effective at the end of the business day Friday.

"Due to the owner's health it's just not possible for us to remain open," a letter addressed to the restaurant's valued customers reads. "We have had an amazing 18 years and it is our hope a new owner will soon appear here and reopen a restaurant. We are doing everything we can to help make that happen."

The letter, signed with "The Ground Round Worthington Staff," is dated May 24, 2022.

Autumn Schmeling, a bartender at the restaurant, said she's been with the Ground Round since it opened in December 2003.

"It's a lot to get through this week. It's really emotional for me," she said. "It's a lot of people I'm going to miss, and so many regulars and so many people I look forward to talking to."

She isn't sure what she's going to do next, but she knows she's going to miss the Ground Round.

"I think it was important. I think it was a place for people to go to get together and meet," Schmeling said. "We often

had people celebrating birthdays and anniversaries and after-graduation and games, and (it's) just a great place for people to get together and feel comfortable when they came in."

The restaurant had been letting people know about the closure on-site since Tuesday, she added.

"Everybody's heartbroken. They're sad," Schmeling said. "Those happy hour times after work, those get-togethers, they're going to miss. They're gonna miss us, and seeing us and talking to us."

She said she hopes someone purchases the business and opens it

back up.

"It's been a struggle for a while, it seems like, after COVID — as is the problem everywhere — with the staffing, but we made it work. We get there early, stay late, do what we need to do just to stay open," said Schmeling, who also penned a touching tribute to the restaurant on her Facebook page.

"I am heartbroken. Eighteen years," she wrote. "I have seen people at their best, I have seen people at their worst. I have been there for you to celebrate your child's sixth birthday, then when they got their license, then their 21st. I



Tim Middagh / The Globe

The Worthington Ground Round, shown here on Wednesday, May 25 is set to close on Friday.

have been there to help cope with your parent's death and when your children went away to college, when your dog died. I have been there to help you celebrate weddings, graduations, new

grandchildren. I have helped plan surprises and helped get you home safely when you had too much to drink. I have laughed with you, I have cried with you.

CLOSING: Page 7

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LOW 65°



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OPTIONS

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“We don’t want the city to be an obstructionist to progress,” Ernst said before addressing Dreessen and Potter. “If we can put down ‘this is what it would take for it to happen. This is how much it would cost approximately,’ then you guys could make a decision.”

Dreessen and Potter both stated they would be willing to help shoulder some of the prospective costs associated with this undertaking, should the city decide to move forward.

The possibility of working with JBS to obtain sewer access through their sanitary system was suggested by Councilman Chad Cummings, as additional options are explored.

While no official action was taken during the meeting, the city agreed to continue discussions in an effort to find an adequate solution for the property’s sewer access.

CLOSING

From Page 1

“To all the people I have had the joy of meeting and seeing, getting to know the last 18 years, THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart for making this not ‘just a job’ but a JOY, an everyday JOY that I have loved doing for the last 18 years.”

Since the public found out the Ground Round is closing, the restaurant has been busier than ever.

“The wonderful support we’ve had from our great customers and from the entire Worthington community has made it a joy to do our jobs. We’ve had a lot of fun serving you,” the letter continues. “From each and every member of our team, thank you for coming in and thank you for your friendship. We will miss you!!!”

The owners have declined to comment further at this time, said manager Louise Rients.



Photos by Kari Lucin / The Globe

Just prior to the graduation ceremony’s scheduled start, a chaotic series of fights broke out at the Learning Center Thursday, May 26. Some individuals held on to their friends and relatives in order to stop them from engaging in the scuffle, as shown.

FIGHT

From Page 1

Some of the crowd eventually moved outside of the Learning Center, where an individual appeared to be bleeding from the nose, and several people attempted to continue fighting, according to a Globe reporter’s account.

The Sanford Worthington Ambulance responded to the scene, as did multiple police officers and sheriff’s office deputies.

After law enforcement separated the individuals and asked some to leave, the graduation ceremony began.



District 518 Superintendent John Landgaard and a Worthington Police officer approach a couple of individuals in the bleachers at the Learning Center graduation as a series of fights broke out.

“It’s just awful that they all had the audacity to ruin a special day for our graduates,” said John Landgaard, District 518 superintendent.

“There’s a few that ruin


it for everybody, that’s the bottom line. It’s a few bad eggs that cause a lot of problems,” he said.

A post on the Worthington Public Schools Face-

book feed states: “We had an unfortunate incident that occurred at the Learning Center before graduation started. The authorities were here to help restore order. Once the situation was handled the Learning Center Graduation moved forward to celebrate the hard work of our LC Graduates. We will be having more security around our buildings tomorrow for the safety of our students.”

As of 3 p.m. Friday, the Worthington Police Department stated they did not have any new information regarding the incident and were still looking into the matter, though they anticipated charges being filed by next week.

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