

BRAINERD DISPATCH

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Snow squall pileup

Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Emergency personnel walk among the damaged vehicles at Hole-in-the-Day Drive on Highway 371 in Nisswa Friday after several cars and trucks crashed in the area where the winds blew snow off of Gull Lake. The whiteout conditions contributed to reduced visibility and slippery conditions making it difficult for emergency personnel to help the crash victims.

Whiteout conditions cause multi-vehicle crash on Highway 371

By Tim Speier
Brainerd Dispatch

Nisswa

Strong wind gusts ripping across Gull Lake's Hole-in-the-Day Bay brought whiteout conditions to Highway 371, causing a multi-car crash just before noon on Friday and shutting down both lanes of the highway for most of the day.

The Nisswa Fire Department responded to the crash, reported at 11:53 a.m. north of Brainerd. According to Nisswa Fire Chief, Shawn Bailey, there were 23 vehicles involved in the crash, including three semi trailers.

The Minnesota State Patrol reported that a sudden snow squall with white-out conditions was to blame for sending three people to Essentia Health-St. Joseph's Medical Center for treatment of injuries.

Leroy Marvin Lorentz, 66, St. Peter, was driving a 2021 Ram 3500 truck. Lorentz, who was wearing a seat belt, was transported to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. No airbags deployed in Lorentz's truck.

Wyatt Joseph Rech, 20, Akeley, was driving a 2019 Chevrolet Silverado. Rech, who was not wearing a seatbelt, the state patrol reported, was transported to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

PILEUP: Page A12

Eichorn, Ruud head toward party nomination fight

Lueck says he won't challenge Kresha in new House district

By Chelsey Perkins
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — A battle for the Republican Party nomination is brewing between state Sens. Justin Eichorn and Carrie Ruud after redistricting placed the two incumbents in the same district.

Meanwhile, two local members of the Minnesota House lumped together within the newly formed District 10A will not find themselves in a similar fight for the party nod after state Rep. Dale Lueck, R-Aitkin, told the Dispatch Friday, Feb. 18, he will not seek



Eichorn



Ruud



Kresha



Lueck

reelection. His counterpart, Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls, announced plans to run in a Thursday news release.

The political shakeups follow Tuesday's release of new congressional and legislative maps of the state decided by the Minnesota Judicial Branch Special Redistricting Panel. The redrawing of

political boundaries, a once-in-a-decade exercise after the U.S. Census updates population data, is intended to equalize the number of constituents served in each district.

Eichorn, a two-term Republican senator from Grand Rapids, issued a news release Thursday announcing his run for the newly formed Senate

District 6. The district includes the northern three-quarters of Crow Wing County along with portions of Cass and Itasca counties.

He said the redistricting played out differently than he expected, but he noted the current Senate District 5 is an area where he already takes a regional approach to recognize the different priorities of the population centers. The new district would be no different, Eichorn, 37, said during a phone interview Thursday.

DISTRICTS: Page A14

Character profile outlines must-haves in next Brainerd superintendent

By Theresa Bourke
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — The next superintendent of Brainerd Public Schools should be a team-builder, a visionary, a spokes-

person for the district and an open-minded, approachable person who puts student needs first.

Those are just a few of the attributes included in the superintendent

profile created after a series of interviews, focus group meetings and survey responses from community members in recent weeks.

Superintendent Laine Larson announced ear-

lier this year she will retire at the end of June after six years in the district. The School Board then contracted with School Exec Connect to begin the search for her replacement.

Consultants from School Exec Connect convened several focus groups composed of staff, students, parents, administrators, business leaders and other community members to

learn what they would like to see in the next superintendent and received 409 responses on a communitywide survey.

SCHOOLS: Page A13

Law enforcement provides tips to avoid cybercrime

By Tim Speier
Brainerd Dispatch

BAXTER — Though less often reported than other crimes, instances of internet and phone-based fraud and scams are on the rise and, according to officials, show no sign of slowing down.

In 2021, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center released its 2020 Internet Crime Report. It states in one year, internet-based crimes have risen 69.4%, from 467,361 reported in 2019 to 791,790 reported in 2020.

The FBI's report includes only incidents that are self-reported through its online portal and that number is an understatement of how often cybercrimes occur, said Baxter Police Sgt. Victor Sofie. Most victims do not report their victimization, he said, as they are often embarrassed or may not even know they have been a victim of a crime.

In 2018, the New York Times interviewed the head of the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center and reported the "number of complaints only

represented about 10 to 12 percent of all estimated cybercrime victims in the United States in 2016, and a fraction of all victims worldwide."

By state, Minnesota ranks 24th on the number of reported cybercrimes in 2020 with 6,847 reported.

John Palcher, an investigator with the Brainerd Police Department, and Travis Loefler, an investigator with the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office, both talked about the increase in cybercrimes over the past few years.

CYBERCRIME: Page A11



Tim Speier / Brainerd Dispatch

Sgt. Victor Sofie, an investigator with the Baxter Police Department, talks about the reporting process Tuesday and how it is used in the department.

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community RESOURCES



Look for the Community Resources Wrap in the upcoming Sunday, February 27th Edition of the Brainerd Dispatch.

PILEUP

From Page A1

A passenger in Rech's pickup, Kaylee Ann Halik, 20, Akeley, was wearing a seatbelt and was transported to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. The Silverado's airbags had deployed.

Bailey said there were multiple people with injuries that did not require them to go to the hospital. About 15 people were transported to Nisswa's fire station by Reichert's Bus Service.

Heading southbound on Highway 371, Jack Peterson of Brainerd said when he came around the Hole-in-the-Day Bay corner, he couldn't see the front of his truck, it was a "total whiteout."

"I saw it coming across the lake," Peterson said. "I started to hit my breaks and then everything disappeared."

Peterson was rear-ended after he came to a stop. He said that he was able to call his son, who had been following about five minutes behind, and tell him to turn around.

Aaron Baseman, who lives just east of Hole-in-the-Day Bay, drove through a short expanse of blowing snow where Gull Lake creates an opening in the trees as he traveled north on Highway 371 into the Nisswa. Vehicles slowed down for the conditions and were through the space quickly. It didn't seem too bad. Past the lake the roads were clear to the north and south, he said.

The return trip was a different story.

On the way home and in the inner southbound lane on Highway 371, Baseman slowed in anticipation of the blowing snow as the sign for Hole-in-the-Day approached. To his right, he saw another car nearly stopped in traffic and he thought don't do that — don't stop in these conditions, keep moving and just watch for what's in front.

As he turned his head



Photos by Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Top: A firefighter walks among damaged vehicles Friday at Hole-in-the-Day Drive in Nisswa after several vehicles crashed in whiteout conditions on Highway 371. Blowing snow reduced visibility in the area near Gull Lake. **Above:** School buses were driven to the scene to transport any drivers or passengers away from the crash scene Friday.

to do just that, he saw a semi tractor-trailer with another truck crushed underneath it just ahead of him.

"So I had to react in like a split second," Baseman said. "And I started sliding sideways. I was about ready to plow into those trucks so I floored my truck and went into the center median and buried it in there and then after that I heard crash and bang and crash and bang behind me."

Outside his truck windows, Baseman could at times see the nearby vehicles and other times when the blowing snow left him entirely isolated in a complete whiteout.

"It was just incredible," he said. "Then the fire trucks started showing up and the ambulances started showing up and Jaws

of Life. There's two different people with Jaws of Life life getting people out of trucks and cars that were crashed and oh my gosh. Horrible. I have never experienced anything like that before."

With his truck buried in the median fairly close to the northbound lanes, Baseman watched as the northbound vehicles went by going slow for conditions and to look at the mayhem. But then as cars were spinning around in front of him, he had a new worry. With no more sound of crashes behind him, concern of unseen vehicles slamming into him from behind abated and turned to those going by in the northbound lanes.

"It was scary," he said. "It was very scary to sit there and not see what was

happening. ...It was just horrendous."

As he waited in his truck, the wind continued to howl where the bay opened up on the lake.

"It sounded like a train and it was just a big howl — just unreal."

Baseman waited in his truck until he could be transported to the Nisswa Fire Department. He had heat and said he was fine, and the emergency responders checked on

him several times.

He watched as a first responder, on the scene in her regular clothes, rushed to the aid of a person injured in the vehicle crushed under the semitrailer, which was about 10 feet away. The first responder got the door open and pulled the airbag aside to reveal an injured person. And every so often he could see a nearby vehicle with a woman and two children in car seats who were taken to an ambulance.

"The responders and everyone that showed up, I mean, they were in brutal elements and crusty with ice and snow around them and they were just machines, they were going to everybody and checking on everybody and they were being as efficient as they could with it and I thanked them many times because that was a tough thing for them to do today and so cold."

Bailey said that the Nisswa Fire Department was on scene by 11:56 a.m. and that they were closing down the highway as they approached the crash.

"I couldn't see the length of a car in front of me," said Chuck Dullum, a Nisswa firefighter.

Eric Myhra, with North Memorial Health Ambulance, was assisting at the scene and telling drivers to stay in their vehicles.

"By the time I walked to the next car, I couldn't see the car I was just standing next to," Myhra said, adding he had never seen anything like it before. "It looked like cars just stopped in the snow."

Heading home from work, Jonathan Johnson was southbound on Highway 371 and

said he couldn't see 5 feet in front of his truck. Everything was gone, he said, then as if appearing out of nowhere, there was a squad car directly in front of his truck.

Johnson said he tried to avoid hitting the officer's vehicle. Though unsuccessful, he did say it was his first time rear-ending a squad car.

The National Weather Service in Duluth Thursday warned of the potential for a snow squall event, which can cause sudden whiteout conditions creating dangerous driving conditions, including multi-vehicle crashes. Blizzard warnings were issued for western Minnesota, including Wadena, Todd and Morrison counties. The weather service warned of the potential for lingering snow squalls Friday night into early Saturday morning.

West to northwest wind gusts of 35-45 mph were expected Friday with isolated gusts up to 50 mph. Brainerd was expected to have wind gusts up to 40 mph Friday but lessening throughout the night into Saturday. Cold temperatures will continue with 28 below wind chill expected Friday night as the air temperature drops to 11 degrees below.

More snowfall is possible Saturday into Sunday and a prolonged period of snow may begin Monday, the weather service reported.

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"I put my heart and mind into my patient's care and, as a result, treat my patients and their families like they are my own."

- Katierae Herron, APRN, CNP

KATIERAE HERRON, APRN, CNP
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