



by Tom Coombe
Echo editor

Busy Ely is Linda Fryer's lasting legacy



Winter's grip on the Ely area was extraordinarily clear last Saturday. Snow was piled high and a step outside during the morning brought the greeting of subzero temperatures. Weather forecasts that morning proved to be accurate, with the coming days bringing both another onslaught of snow, followed by a return to the deep freeze and even a wind-chill warning or two.

A drive around town offered further evidence. Covid and Omicron be damned, both locals and visitors were getting out and about. Frozen lakes were the destination for some as the trout opener ushered in the start of another local tradition.

Snowmobiles, and pickups or sub-urbans hauling snowmobiles, could be seen at gas stations.

People were also out and about in advance of youth basketball and hockey games, skiing on area trails, and those in Ely for dogsled excursions.

That night, more than one local lodging establishment posted "No Vacancy" signs and a trip to the Grand Ely Lodge for dinner was preceded by a long walk to the building from a parking spot near the Pioneer Mine site. That's because the parking lot at the GEL was completely full.

Sitting down to dinner that night, it was hard not to think about the scene that day, and its link to recent and shocking news that Linda Fryer had passed away.

A former Ely business owner, Linda was probably best known for her decades in charge of the Ely Chamber of Commerce, where her passion for Ely and desire to bring visitors to the community knew no bounds.

Under Linda's watch, the Ely Chamber

made remarkable strides as a vehicle to drive traffic into the community and the area's motels and resorts, restaurants and bars, outfitters and downtown business district.

The means were both traditional and unique.

Sport shows and billboards, advertising in major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, and alliances with outdoor writers and those who produced those Saturday morning fishing shows. If one tuned in during the 1990s or 2000s and encountered one of those TV fishing guides on an Ely lake, there's a good chance Linda had a hand in making that happen.

Ely's festivals took off during Linda's tenure. Blueberry/Art weekend went from a couple dozen booths on a downtown avenue to an event that filled the park, launched a series of auxiliary events and seemed to bring people from every corner of the country.

Once the Blueberry/Art was well established, Linda turned her attention to the September Harvest Moon event, always looking for an angle that would bring a few more people to the park. I'll never forget when she spoke, with infectious enthusiasm, about her plan for a series of stunt dog shows as part of the event. Sure

enough, not long after the conversation one could stroll into the park and see captivated kids and adults taking in the show.

There were promotions. Those who've lived here awhile may remember when Ely was promoted to be the home of "Obsessive, Compulsive, Fishermen."

There were many, in this corner included, who scoffed at more than a few of the April Fool's campaigns. But one can't argue with success. And every time a regional or national media outlet touted the April 1 jokes that Ely was being purchased by Canada, or would make a fictitious bid for the Summer Olympics, the community was getting attention. And that's exactly what Linda wanted.

One of Linda's most underrated skills was her diplomacy. As the head of Ely's Chamber she walked a political tightrope, serving members who came from differing walks of life and opposing perspectives over Ely's tourist industry, business culture and even its development future. In 2003, she was at the center of a political firestorm, when tourism destinations faced threats of cancellation over the city council's ill-advised attempt to take a stand - that it ultimately rescinded - over war in Iraq.

Linda dealt with that and numerous other political footballs with grace and savvy. I knew her for decades and don't have a clue of where she stood politically. That to me is the ultimate compliment.

The news last week of her passing came as a jolt and leaves another void in our community. Given an association in local media that now spans decades, it's becoming more common to see or hear the news of the deaths of those who were key players in Ely in an earlier time. Linda's passing follows that last month of Ely's first woman mayor - Lolita Schnitzius -



and the 2021 departure of longtime city clerk and former Winton mayor Lee Tessier. There have been many others as well, and it's a sad indicator of time long-spent in Ely.

Linda's work carries on in Ely. It's ironic that on the same day the Echo included the announcement of Linda's passing, a story on another page highlighted the recent work of Cindy Smyka and the Ely Tourism Bureau.

With a few new wrinkles, including advances that come with technology, a new logo, and more of a focus on new media, Cindy is leading an alliance that includes both the city and the Ely Chamber on a longstanding mission - promoting Ely as a vacation destination.

That indeed is a lasting tribute to Linda. Surely this winter and undoubtedly come summer, there will be more No Vacancy signs and filled parking lots in Ely. And somewhere Linda will be smiling.

At-home COVID-19 tests now covered by private health plans, with important guidelines for Minnesotans to get costs covered

As of January 15, 2022, costs for at-home COVID-19 tests are now required to be covered by health plans offered by insurance companies, employers and groups under actions taken by the Biden Administration to expand Americans' access to free COVID-19 testing. It is important for Minnesota consumers to follow guidelines in order to get the costs covered by your health plan.

"Testing is a vital part of stopping the spread of COVID-19. President Biden's actions to add private health plan coverage for at-home tests is one more important option to assure Minnesotans have access to COVID-19 tests at no cost to you," said Commerce Commissioner Grace Arnold.

Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcom said, "We encourage you to get tested for COVID-19 if you

are exposed to or feel symptoms of COVID-19, whether it's at home or at a testing site. Testing is one of the critical strategies to slow the spread and prevent further hospitalizations and deaths from this virus."

Here is a brief summary of the new health plan coverage for COVID-19 at-home tests and guidance for you to have the costs covered.

For additional details, see these Frequently Asked Questions posted by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

WHAT IS COVERED?

• Coverage is for over-the-counter COVID-19 diagnostic tests authorized, cleared or approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

• Up to \$12 (or actual cost if less than \$12) per individual test, and up to 8 tests per person per month,

is covered.

• This additional cost coverage applies to private insurers or group health plans (such as self-insured employers). It also includes MN-sure private health plans for individuals.

• Different guidelines apply to Medicare and Medicaid public health plans.

HOW ARE COSTS COVERED?

#1 - Check with your health plan first: The most important guidance for Minnesotans is to check with your health plan first, prior to purchasing at-home tests, to ensure you are following the steps necessary to have your costs covered. Find your health plan contact information by looking on the back of your health insurance card. Contact member services.

#2 - Check for direct coverage: Rather than seeking reimburse-

ment for test costs, check with your health plan about direct coverage options, where you might be able to obtain at-home tests to be free at the point of sale, so you do not need to request reimbursement.

#3 - Follow process for reimbursement: If you pay for at-home tests out of your own pocket, you will need to find out from your health plan how to submit to get those costs reimbursed. Your health plan may require you to submit receipts for reimbursement if you pay for the tests out of pocket and send in a form.

Your health plan may still be in process of establishing how you can obtain reimbursement or direct coverage, but both options are required for health plans to offer.

Options that continue to be free of charge for Minnesota consumers for COVID-19 tests:

- Tests at state-operated testing

sites, which you can obtain without scheduling in advance

- Tests you can schedule with your clinic

- Tests you can schedule with your pharmacist

Find a vaccine site and more info at mn.gov/covid19.

For people who have tested positive and need to test negative before returning to group settings, such as work onsite, school or daycare, you need to check what type of test will be accepted.

Minnesotans who have complaints about obtaining this additional coverage for private health plans regulated by the state (this does not include employers who are self-insured) can file a complaint online with Commerce or can contact Commerce's Consumer Services Center: 651-539-1600 or 800-657-3602 or consumer.protection@state.mn.us.

Operation Round Up gives more than \$65,000 to community programs

Through the contributions of Lake Country Power's participating members, the Operation Round Up Electric Trust Board recently approved \$65,466 in assistance to local community programs during its quarterly meeting.

The cooperative's Trust Board reviewed and considered 49 grant applications and distributed funds to 45 projects and programs this past quarter. Since the program's inception in October 2004, more than \$2.8 million has been distributed to community-based projects and programs.

All funds generated through Operation Round Up are set aside in a trust fund. A voluntary Trust Board of nine co-op mem-

bers administers the trust. Of the funds collected through the program, 100 percent is distributed to charitable organizations through an application and selection process. The Trust Board uses special guidelines and policies when choosing recipients.

Most recent recipients include:

- American Association of University Women Ely branch: \$1,000 funding toward STEM workshops in 2022

- Ely Community Resource, Inc.: \$950 funding toward the children's garden in Ely

- Mesabi Symphony Orchestra: \$500 funding toward complimentary student tickets

- Township of Breitung: \$2,000 funding toward recreational improvements

- Ely ArtWalk: \$250 funding toward the 2022 Ely ArtWalk

- Ely Winter Festival: \$750 toward the 2022 Ely Winter Festival

Operation Round Up is a charitable program unique to electric co-ops, which is designed to provide financial assistance to worthwhile activities and community projects by "rounding up" members' dollar bills to the nearest dollar. The average donation of each participating Lake Country Power member is less than \$6 annually.

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YOU CAN HELP

Lynn DeNio

Fire Recovery Account

On Dec. 22, Lynn DeNio's Ely home was engulfed in smoke and flames. Luckily, they were alerted by Greg Mosher who was walking by - and Lynn and her sister Jean fled their home with what they could carry. The Ely Fire Department put out the flames, but much of the interior was damaged. It's estimated that their home won't be habitable again for at least 6 months.

Friends have set up a **"Fire Recovery Fund"** for Lynn and Jean at the **Ely Credit Union, 2 East Chapman Street, Ely.** While their insurance will cover some of the loss, it won't cover everything.

Your generous contribution to this account will enable Lynn and Jean to help pay for household items and clothes that were lost in the fire.

Thank you for your kindness and generosity!

GET IT OFF YOUR CHEST

Write a letter to the editor and sign your name, phone #. Send it to: Ely Echo, 15 East Chapman St., Ely MN 55731 or email to: elyecho@aol.com

The Echo reserves the right to edit.