

VIEWS BY THE ECHO PRESS



Alexandria Echo Press file photo

City crews at a spring Alexandria Metal Pick-Up Day a few years ago didn't let a little snow stop them from collecting discarded metal items from around town. This spring's Metal Pick Up Day is set for Tuesday, April 26.

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

Spiffing up the city

Thumbs Up: The city of Alexandria is doing its part in spiffing up the city. As an incentive to help city residents clean up their properties this spring, the city is partnering with Alex Rubbish and Recycling by designating Tuesday, April 26 as Free Metal Pick-Up Day. City residents with metal objects they want to get rid of can place the items on their boulevard and have them removed at no extra charge. Note: furniture, mattresses, electronics or televisions will not be accepted. Advice for those who aren't sure if the object is metal: If a magnet adheres to it, it will be hauled away. Residents must fill out an agreement form which will be printed in the newspaper and Lakeland Shopper, starting next week.

Legislature should support the arts

Thumbs Up: Where would we be without the arts? Just from an economic perspective, Minnesota would lose \$12.9 billion annually, according to economic impact studies, and the state would also lose 95,000 jobs. According to Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, Main Streets across Minnesota were dealt a heavy blow when 57% of Minnesotans in the arts and culture sector lost their jobs when COVID forced events to be canceled, productions to stop, and venues to close. "Minnesota has already helped other businesses recover. It's time for the legislature to do the same for this key part of our economy," the arts group said in a news release this week. It's asking for residents across the state to support legislation that would use one-time COVID relief funds to help arts and cultural groups recover. People

can go to the website – <https://artsmn.org/> – and sign a petition that supports House File 2637.

A snow angel

Thumbs Up: A reader wants to remind people that there are still good people out there. "After the snow on March 30, a nice young man shoveled out his neighbor's driveway and as heavy as the snow was, it wasn't an easy task," he said. "He was working really hard at it and then his dad came over to help him finish the job. When I see acts of kindness like that I know there is still good in this world!"

Misinformation about poultry

Thumbs Down: The avian flu that's been found in 13 poultry flocks as of April 4 is a cause for serious concern. It's affected more than 580,000 birds, according to the Minnesota Board of Animal Health. No flocks in Douglas County have been impacted so far. Complicating the avian flu threat, is a misconception among consumers that poultry products are unsafe to eat. That's simply not true. As stated by Rep. John Burkel, R-Badger, a fourth generation turkey producer: "Minnesotans need to know that poultry remains safe to eat, and the best thing we can do to support our poultry industry is to keep buying Minnesota-made chicken and turkey." Burkel added that the avian flu outbreak is devastating news for poultry farmers who went through an outbreak in 2015, but the good news, he said, is that the state is much more prepared this time around.

If you have a suggestion for a Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, email it to aedenloff@echopress.com or mail it to Echo Press, P.O. Box 549, Alexandria, MN 56308.

A stage of my life

I remember my first time. My stomach twisted like a Kansas tornado, and my palms moistened as I paced the basement.



THALEN ZIMMERMAN
Thalen's Turn

"What if they don't react." "What if all the practice doesn't pay off." "What if studying those videos doesn't help."

All these "what ifs" danced in my head. They tormented me.

I sat and tapped my foot and tucked my head between my knees.

The movement in my stomach intensified. I ran to the toilet and said hello to lunch. At least I felt lighter now.

I looked toward the ceiling as I heard them arrive upstairs. Showtime. Time to buck up.

I took a shot of whiskey to kill the nerves and proceeded upstairs. It was dark at the top and I bumped into someone.

They leaned in and whispered, "You ready for this?"

"Ready as I will ever be," I replied.

"Let's do this," they returned.

I closed my eyes.

One by one, my cast mates were called on stage. Then I heard my name.

"Time to be funny," I thought to myself.

I leaped from backstage to center stage and confronted the audience. All my nerves melted like a third date candle.

When I hit the stage, I felt electric. We all did. Our first time was fantastic. We had laughs, we had "ohs," and we had fun. And so did the crowd.

That was my first-night doing improv comedy.

Some buddies from high school and I organized back-to-back shows at the Roosevelt Hall Prairie Wind Players Theatre in Barrett in April 2018.

My friends and I have always been quote-on-quote "entertainers" — from class closing to a couple of them acting in school dramas during their middle and high school years. I only performed in plays my senior year. I was a late bloomer. I almost attended an acting school in New



Contributed

From left, Cody Mehlhaf, Daniel Rauchbauer, David Ehlers, Thalen Zimmerman and Kayleigh Odegaard reach for the mic to promote their last comedy show, *Improv the Last Stand*.

York, but I chickened out when they said we needed to audition first.

However, what I really enjoyed was writing scripts and making videos. This is why I enrolled in the Mass Communication program at Bemidji State University.

During orientation, they said we would learn video production and editing, writing and photography and access to the school's television and radio station. It was the closest Bemidji had to a film program, so I was sold. I did not even look into job placement percentages and pay; I wanted to have fun.

During my time at college, other students in my department wanted to be TV news anchors, radio personalities and journalists. I wanted to be an entertainer. If I had a chance to work out my creative side, I didn't hesitate. This is why I wrote a parody of the show "Cops," which made fun of campus security — I am pretty proud of that one. You can see the pilot episode on my YouTube channel.

In 2018, when my friend, Daniel Rauchbauer, asked if I would participate in an improv show, I didn't need much convincing.

We prepared by meeting a few weekends leading up to the show. We went over which games we should perform and watched "Whose Line is it Anyway."

We had a great turnout with lots of laughs during our first performance, which repeated the second night.

Since then, we have done five shows over four

years. We skipped 2020 for obvious reasons.

Now, I am preparing for another show, our last show, which will take place at 7 p.m. on Saturday, April 9, in Barrett at Roosevelt Hall. We even titled it, "Improv the Last Stand."

Even though I have done this a few times and generally to the same audience, I still get those original nerves. But every time I walk on stage and look out to the pond of people, those feelings subside, and I let loose without a care in the world.

Laughter really is the best medicine. It is therapeutic. Not just for me, not just for my improv group, but also for the audience. Whether you are laughing or making someone laugh, the effect is the same.

Comedy is a way for us to laugh at ourselves and each other. To call out our insecurities and send them packing. And to remind ourselves, life is a lot better if we can laugh at the things that upset us.

We say stupid things to make people laugh. Sometimes we say really stupid things, and nobody laughs. You brush it off and move on to the next joke because life is all about taking risks and learning from mistakes. But if I can get just one person to laugh in a room filled with dozens, hundreds or even thousands, I still consider that a win. This is why I feel bittersweet about this being our last show.

I won't miss the nerves, but I will miss the laughs.

"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

COMMENTARY

Creating affordable homes is an 'all-hands-on-deck' crisis

By Lori Anderson,

Executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County

Many of you have heard about MacKenzie Scott's recent historic donation of \$436 million to Habitat for Humanity International and 84 local Habitats. While Habitat for Humanity of Douglas County did not receive any funds, we celebrate with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, as the sole recipient of a gift in Minnesota and look forward to seeing the impact of that gift in the metro area.

Minnesota has one of the largest housing shortages in the nation. The State of Minnesota is creating between 100 and 140 new affordable ownership units annually but needs to be creating more than 2,700

units annually to meet the demand of our growing population. If we assume each new ownership unit needs about \$75,000 in state support to make it affordable, basic math shows we need over \$200 million per year to close the gap.

One in four Douglas County households spends more than 30% of their monthly income on housing. While rent and housing prices continue to rise, incomes are not, making it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. This often forces people to make impossible choices between safe housing, nutritious food, healthcare, and reliable transportation. Which would you choose?

Despite volatile cost fluctuations, supply chain interruptions, and other market forces, Habitat for

Humanity of Douglas County has continued to grow and increase our impact. This year we celebrate our 25th anniversary and plan to build four new affordable homes. The historic increase in building costs is a significant challenge this year as we will experience an increase of \$100,000 to build these homes.

Scott's generosity is inspiring, and we are thankful for her intentional investment in what we know works for poverty alleviation. Affordable homeownership is critical to breaking the cycle of generational poverty, closing the racial wealth gap, and solving our state's affordable housing crisis. To solve this crisis, we must be "all hands on deck." Minnesota needs every layer of its community pushing to create

a more just and equitable homeownership system. This includes individuals, private companies, nonprofits, and every level of our government. We need a system where every household can access ownership and build wealth for their families.

Right now, our state Senate and House leaders are talking with the governor about what investments we are going to make with the \$9 billion surplus we have this year. As many of us have said before, there is no excuse not to take actionable steps forward and make our own historic investment in affordable housing. We have the resources, we know we have the need, and we know what the solution is — so let's get it done and invest \$2 billion in affordable housing this year.

We are thrilled that Ms. Scott sees our work in the Habitat for Humanity network as effective. She knows what we know: affordable homeownership creates healthier families, better schools, stronger economies, and it builds generational wealth. We need "all hands on deck."

The lives of 129 Douglas County families have been positively impacted through their partnership with Habitat. This would not be possible without community support.

Now is the time to use your gifts to support Habitat's mission: your financial gifts, your talents, and your voice. Together, we can build a world where everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.