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TOUGH ROAD

VIDEO
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Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

COVID, cold, shortage of drivers strains the Reichert Bus Service

By Steve Kohls
Brainerd Dispatch

Baxter

On a normal year, Reichert Bus Service has 81 bus routes serving the Brainerd School District.

The 2021-2022 school year has been anything but normal. Currently, Reichert's combined 10 bus routes for a total of 71 routes.

"They talk about a national shortage. It's not (just) a shortage, it is a critical shortage now," said L.C. Baier, Reichert Bus Service general manager.

And that doesn't account for all the regular work that needs to be done just to get the buses running, Baier added.

"Typical cold days like this, Andrew Doucette and I are out there at 3:15 a.m. making sure everything on the lot starts, oil is checked, coolant is checked, get them ready for the day and make sure they are warm," he said, noting frigid days are no exception. "Everything started this morning with the exception of one, which was an older spare."

BUSES: Page 11

Should code enforcement be complaint driven or should it be proactive?

By Tim Speier
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — The Brainerd City Council discussed what codes to enforce and how those codes should be enforced during the Tuesday, Jan. 24, workshop.

With the pending adoption of the city's

new zoning code, property maintenance code and rental code, Brainerd Community Development Director David Chanski said now is a perfect time to discuss the future of code enforcement.

"Do you like that we're doing proactive (code enforcement) or do you want us to do just complaint-driven (code enforcement)," Chanski said. "That's what we're trying to get because sometimes we hear something is not getting done or that we're being heavy-handed. So we're just trying to even it out. We want to know exactly what you, as the council, want us to do."

Chanski said his department is there to enforce the city's codes, as directed, not to make the codes or to choose how those codes are enforced.

"The constituents elect the elected officials and we should pass ordinances and laws,"

CODE: Page 11

With temperatures at 17 degrees below zero Tuesday, a Reichert bus driver performs a safety pre-check on their bus before leaving the Baxter bus yard. With COVID-19 and the company short 25 drivers, 2022 has started with several challenges. Every available driver from the company staff is on a route in the mornings and evenings for the Brainerd School District. Some routes have been consolidated because of the lack of drivers.

Day cares to get funding boost

Board awards relief dollars to expand child care access

By Chelsey Perkins
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — Nearly 200 new child care slots are expected to become available in Crow Wing County thanks to grants awarded to providers from American Rescue Plan Act funding.

The Crow Wing County Board Tuesday, Jan. 25, approved grants totaling \$800,000 for a list of 25 organizations seeking to expand availability or to start a new child care business.

In distributing the COVID-19 relief funds doled out by the federal government, commissioners agreed to prioritize improving access to child care in light of a significant shortage of availability for parents in need of care. A 2021



VIDEO
For video, see brainerddispatch.com

Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Micah Osafo, left, and Hudson Mertens cut paper figures with the help of Hannah Rybak, Dazzling Dinosaur teacher at Trinity Children's Center, on Tuesday in Brainerd.

"COVID has created a very unique situation, and trying to keep everybody healthy has been exhausting."

BECKY DRYBURGH,
DIRECTOR OF TRINITY
CHILDREN'S CENTER

director of the Brainerd Lakes Area Economic Development Corp.

Glynn previously told the board a lack of child care options exacerbates the labor crunch, prompting some parents to stay out of the workforce with no options for care. The county enlisted Glynn to assist with the application process of its grant program, as he did during previous

FUNDING: Page 9

study, which surveyed 1,200 more slots. And 43 employers, parents and day care providers in Crow Wing County, showed a need for at least

Fewer masks possible in schools

By Theresa Bourke
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — If new COVID-19 cases begin decreasing at Brainerd Public Schools, the district's face covering mandate could be dialed back.

School Board members approved new parameters Monday, Jan. 24, to decide when COVID-19 mitigation strategies — like required masking —

"The best thing we can do is to keep evaluating the data, listening to people, hearing their concerns and act. That's all we can do."

KEVIN BOYLES, BOARD MEMBER

could be lessened. The board already voted in November to no longer require masks at most after-school high school activities, as case numbers were declining at the time, and administrators believed it would be a good first step that could be measured. Cases continued to decrease through the end of 2021 but spiked again when students came back from winter

break in early January. The past three weeks, the district has seen more positive cases than at any other time since the beginning of the school year.

But if cases were to start declining again, the board has a plan.

If new positive COVID-19 cases in the district decrease for three consecutive weeks and stay

MASKS: Page 11

Baxter reviews legal standing regarding obscenity

By Tim Speier
Brainerd Dispatch

BAXTER — The Baxter City Council received a memo regarding the council's legal standing following a request to regulate indecent words publicly displayed on signs.

And with it, the city is moving forward under direction that profanity on signs or flags is protected speech.

The memo, drafted by Baxter City Attorney Brad Person, was included

in the council's Jan. 18 meeting materials and was drafted in response to a Baxter resident.

The resident brought his concerns to the Baxter City Council Tuesday, Jan. 4, about publicly displaying profanity within city limits.

On Jan. 4, Baxter resident Dr. James Roelofs asked the council to look into regulating profanity displayed within the city — specifically noting a "Trump 2020" flag that included the phrase, "F*** your feelings" — and

argued that the First Amendment does not protect all speech.

"Now, my comments are not about political candidates, politics or that sort of thing," Roelofs said Jan. 4. "It's about the use of offensive language in our community. I feel this language is offensive. Not the public face we want to have in our community."

Person wrote though it's true the First Amendment does not

OBSCENITY: Page 11

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DEATHS A5 OPINION A6 CLASSIFIED A12-14 CHURCH A10
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B2

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