

## GUEST VIEWS

## Local leaders offer wishes for the new year

With 2021 in the rearview mirror, the Pine Knot News reached out to a variety of local leaders to ask them what they hope Carlton County will see in 2022. Here's what those who responded said:

**Minnesota Rep. Mike Sundin**

"As we reflect on the difficult times that we have experienced in the last couple of years, I'd like to thank the people that have contributed to keeping us healthy and safe as best as they could. Health care professionals and public servants of Carlton County deserve to be recognized for their efforts in safeguarding public health. My wish is that we honor the efforts of these public servants by getting vaccinated and encouraging others to do the same."

**Dave Lee, director of Carlton County Public Health and Human Services**

"My wish is that we finally turn the corner on the spread of Covid-19. Our community has done an excellent job in practicing good public health, rallying to make vaccines available and working to keep our families and neighbors safe. Our medical community and schools need a break. Addressing the mental health stress we are experiencing will be very important moving forward. We need to remember all that we have been able to accomplish over the past two years."

**Mayor Roger Maki, Cloquet**

"My hope for Carlton County for 2022 is that we, as government and community leaders, can significantly increase affordable housing units. Naturally, my preference is to see most of those units come to Cloquet, but I will be happy regardless of where in the county real progress is made. This problem has been around for as long as I have been working in real estate (52 years). Let's work together to solve it."

**Holly Hansen, Cloquet community development director**

"I hope our industries and businesses thrive, and that entrepreneurs consider the possibilities Cloquet has to offer. I hope this community continues to appreciate and support businesses that we have here and strives to intentionally shop here. I hope investment, development, and communitywide revitalization efforts continue bringing Cloquet to its best and fullest potential. I hope developers open up property for single-family home development and gentle-density projects. I hope skilled developers consider loft apartment opportunities in our downtown. I hope this region continues to grow in awareness of all that Cloquet has to offer, and the people we have here know that it is a great place to be."

**Gary Peterson, Carlton County Board of Commissioners chairman**

In November we'll have the vote on the half-cent sales tax. Hopefully people will understand this is the best route we can have to fund the jail and justice center and they will pass the tax, because we don't have a choice about building a new jail. I hope the state will also share some of its surplus to give us more help establishing the new women's program there. But the biggest thing is I wish we could get through this pandemic and everything that comes along with it, including increased governmental regulations.

**Kim Belcastro, Wrenshall superintendent**

"The last two school years have been the most difficult years in my 32-year career in public education. It is my personal hope that 2022 is the year to get beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. I also hope that this positive movement forward will bring unity among staff, students, parents, guardians and community members. The pan-

demic has had many negative side effects that have adversely impacted daily life inside and outside our school buildings. Carlton County is a great place to raise and educate students. However, the pandemic proved that even in Carlton County not all students were able to be afforded the opportunities to get what they needed and deserved in order to be successful. My motto for the year is to be 'Hopeful and Supportive' to all."

**Rick Breuer, CEO Community Memorial Hospital**

I hope we can get to the next phase of Covid in 2022, one where many of us can resume the things that bring us joy: connections with others, hobbies, fellowship and hugs. We also will need a time of healing for all those who have suffered from Covid as well as the caregivers, and I hope 2022 brings respite for us all.

**Stephanie Hammitt, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College president**

A top priority or wish for 2022 would be to see less divisiveness in our world today, whether it be locally, statewide or nationally. The last couple of years has taken a toll on many individuals and the struggle is real. At Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College we pride ourselves on living and operating within our core values. They include Respect (Manajidiwin), Integrity (Gwayakwadiziwin), Stewardship (Ganawenjigewin), Innovation (Maamamiikajinendamowin), and Compassion (Zhawenjigewin). By keeping these core values in mind and using them to guide our decisions and actions, we hope to see less division in society while at the same time recognizing the strength and real power that individual ideas and opinions can bring to the table when arriving at those decisions.

## Weeds are thick in redistricting efforts

The whole point of a representative democracy (which is the form of government we have used in the United States for a couple of hundred years or so) is to elect one person for every certain number of people. We could use a different form of representation, maybe letting each group of like-minded people have a representative, like plumbers can elect a representative, or dog lovers get a representative, or any other myriad ways to elect leaders, but we don't. It's based on population, the truest form of democracy there is — one person, one vote.

So, of course, politicians are very eager to twist and manipulate that process. While they will campaign on a platform of good government, protecting democracy and pursuit of the American way, politicians are actually subverting democracy at every chance because they enjoy the power. Restricting the vote (women couldn't vote until about 100 years ago; the black vote was restricted in many places until the 1960s), putting up roadblocks to voting to make it harder for some to vote, and drawing districts into bizarre boundaries are all designed to

subvert the democratic process.

Minnesota is going through the redistricting process right now. After every Census, boundaries are redrawn to best represent the people. Defining "best" is up for debate, and debate they do. It's up to the Legislature to set the boundaries for each state senate district; then divide it in half for each representative's district. Since it's the Legislature's job, of course, they won't do it and the courts have to get involved.

I'm not so sure that's a bad thing. The legislature is made up of politicians who over the years have decided it's their job to advocate for their political party, not for the people of their district. I don't like it, but that's how it has turned out. You would think something so basic as drawing lines on a map to make 67 districts including roughly the same population would be easy, right? Well, it is. But add politics and it becomes impossible.

So the courts are standing by, ready to make the decision. By law, I understand, if the legislature can't get the job done by Feb. 15, then the courts take over. Judges apply different logic to problem solving

than politicians do, which may be helpful in this situation. The law says districts must meet certain criteria, such as equal population, compliance with the federal Voting Rights Act, and be compact and contiguous. They must also preserve political subdivisions (cities, counties, and townships aren't split in half) and "communities of interest."

Such criteria is ripe for abuse by politicians who focus on "communities of interest" rather than basic math. Courts have much less discretion to pursue political agendas and thus focus on complying with the law.

There are four parties suing the Minnesota Secretary of State office in a lawsuit that will determine redistricting. Each one has a specific agenda. There's one group for the DFL; one for Republicans; one advocating for a "least change" approach; and one hoping to better serve communities of color.

The DFL and Republican proposals have the least amount of credibility, as they each seem to advocate for preservation of party power.

Surprisingly, the "least change" proposal seems to accomplish the same thing. It proposes keeping things as close as

possible to the way things are now, which sounds good until you realize that population shifts make redistricting a critical process, not a mere adjustment.

I had an opposite reaction to the proposal concerning people of color. At first, I thought that group was undemocratic and didn't belong in the process, as they seem to be advocating for a certain group. But after I read the proposal, it seems to make sense. There would be a house district that has a significant Native population, and the Eighth Congressional District boundary would include several major tribal nations.

Like many big jobs, I'm glad I don't have to do it. But I am curious to see how redistricting turns out, both for federal as well as state offices. The legislative session ends May 17 and the deadline to file for state office is May 31, so we should have an answer by then.

*Pete Radosevich is the publisher of the Pine Knot News and an attorney in Esko who hosts the cable access talk show Harry's Gang on CAT-7. His opinions are his own. Contact him at [Pete.Radosevich@PineKnotNews.com](mailto:Pete.Radosevich@PineKnotNews.com).*

## HARRY'S GANG



Pete Radosevich



# Grape pop

When Mary Jo was 7, someone called her “Fatso” as she and her family were walking out of the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart church on a sunny Sunday morning. The offending girl was Mary Jo’s age and she leaned into Mary Jo’s ear as the crush of exiting churchgoers pressed them together, the Confirmed adults reaching for the Holy Water font, dutifully dipping their fingers.

“Yer a fatso,” she’d whispered and then pulled away, back to her place between her two parents, who remained perfectly ignorant of the psychological tattoo their precious daughter had just carved into the self-consciousness of someone else’s.

Until then, Mary Jo had never considered herself fat. Or skinny. Or tall or short or pretty or ugly or smart or not-smart. In fact, until then, she’d never really considered herself at all. She was just a part of the world. Until then, she’d been Unconsiderable.

When she got home from church that day, Mary Jo went immediately to the mirror above the bathroom sink, standing on the toilet for a full-body reflection, and stared. At herself.

“Fatso,” she heard her mind say. From that moment on the church steps, steeple bells pealing in the robin egg sky, Mary Jo was hyper-self-considerable. The picture she kept of herself in her mind’s eye was the image of her standing on the toilet, looking into the mirror at the person she loathed ever since.

By middle school, Mary Jo embraced her self-loathing with the same subconscious intentionality that addicts of every stripe perfect. And she fed her self-hatred as she fed her self. I’m a fatso ... so I’m gonna act like a fatso ....

But, honestly, Mary Jo didn’t really overeat. Fatso was way beyond food. Mary Jo acted fat to fit into her Fatso self image.

Meanwhile, as her self-loathing enveloped her psyche like a python on a rabbit, Mary Jo’s disposition toward everyone else was gentle and pleasant and emotionally generous. Even the kids that teased and harassed her mercilessly, brutally, if thunderbolted with truth serum, would have had to admit that Mary Jo was a deeply good person. And for anyone with a modicum of emotional intelligence, that goodness radiated outward from Mary Jo as intensely and obviously as her self-deprecation stabbed inward.

NOTES FROM THE SMALL POND



Parnell Thill

Ken was in his mid-50s when he met Mary Jo. She and her dad had ridden their bicycles past Ken’s house as he was watering his lawn, shirtless and beer-bellied, sweating bottle of Pfeiffer’s hanging loosely from his fingers, empty.

Ken and Mary Jo’s dad were acquainted. Small-town stuff. Mary Jo’s grampa and Ken were about the same age and Ken had known Mary Jo’s dad since he was Mary Jo’s age. Mary Jo’s dad was a local hockey legend. That mattered.

That day on their bikes, Ken had waved and whistled his notable, shrill whistle, an invitation to stop and “BS awhile.”

They stopped. Mary Jo’s goodness radiated, even as she looked down at the street, self-conscious. Ken read her immediately, and as he and Mary Jo’s dad BS’d, he slowly and gently pulled her into their conversation, hinting at a sense of joy that was possible and present, always, even when one’s internal monologue was anything but joyful.

“Pretty nice bike you got there, Kiddo,” Ken said. “Yer dad must sorta like ya.”

Mary Jo looked up, smiling; her sweetness showing in her eyes — the same brown eyes that hid the darkness roiling

within.

“Thank you,” she said, and smiled. “I sorta like him, too.”

Her dad laughed and gave her a little shove, kissed her on the crown of her head.

“Especially when he buys me nice bikes ...” she added, sensing the tease-able atmosphere.

“HA!” Ken laughed, fully smitten, and turned to throw his empty beer bottle into the yard of freshly cut grass. He looked back at Mary Jo’s dad, “She’s a little smart aleck, ain’t she!”

Mary Jo’s dad was smiling, nodding his head, exaggeratedly.

“I love it!” Ken said and reached out, tousled Mary Jo’s dark hair. “And she’s cuter’n a bug in a rug, too!”

Something in Mary Jo flitted, like a dimly flickering candle in an enormous, dark castle.

“She sure is,” Mary Jo’s dad said. Then slower and lower, “She sure as hell is.”

There’s a particular kind of helplessness and smothering grief familiar to every daughter’s father — the helplessness and grief of knowing your daughter is suffering and struggling uselessly to hide it, knowing her compulsion to hide it is due, in large part, to the fact that she does not want to trouble you, hurt you with the truth of her suffering — a sort of protective mechanism, daughter-to-father.

Ken, sensing all of this, himself familiar with this dynamic, via his own daughter, chronically uncomfortable with being uncomfortable, changed the mood.

“You two want anything? Bottle of beer? Can of pop? New bike?” He lightly kicked the front tire of Mary Jo’s bicycle, bent down to her eye level. “Huh? Whaddaya want, Sweetheart? Punch in the nose?”

Mary Jo laughed and her brown eyes sparkled, the candle within her brightening.

“Kinda pop do ya have?” Ken straightened up. “What kind ya want?” “Kind ya have?” “Kind ya want?” “Kind ya have?”

They teased back and forth, each of them leaning forward toward the other, when delivering their respective lines, like a pair of improv comedic actors, while Mary Jo’s dad beamed, shaking his head satisfyingly.

Finally, Ken said, “We got Pfeiffer. We got Old Milwaukee. We got Michelob. We got Blatz. Which one ya want there, Sunshine?”

Mary Jo’s dad doubled over, laughing uproariously. Mary Jo, not quite getting the joke, but absolutely overjoyed at being part of it without being the cruel brunt of it, smiled like a cat.

“Grape,” she said. “I’ll take grape.”

“Perfect,” Ken said and turned to go get it.

“Grape Pfeiffer!” Mary Jo called after him, a happy naughty smile across her face.

Ken and Mary Jo’s dad burst open with thunderous laughter and Ken spun around to face them, bending at the waist, hands on his knees as if to steady himself on a spinning planet.

“Holy smokes there, Kiddo! You are a little firecracker, ain’t ya!” He was still laughing as he returned with the can of Welch’s Grape Soda and handed it to Mary Jo. “There ya go, Sweetheart. Stop by any time and I’ll always have a can for ya.”

She did.

And so did he.

*Cloquet’s Parnell Thill is author of “Killing the Devil and Other Excellent Tricks,” available online. His opinions are his own, as are a few of the moments he describes to make his point. Contact him at news@pineknotnews.com.*

## The STREAM Scene

Where all the top choices can be found in one place!

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**“Movie: Hotel Transylvania: Transformania”**

Drac and his monster pack are back in this latest edition of the animated film franchise, which finds them transformed into humans and Johnny into a monster by Van Helsing’s “Monsterification Ray.” Forced to team up, they race around the world to find a cure before it’s too late. Jim Gaffigan, Andy Samberg, Selena Gomez and Brian Hull head an all-star voice cast. (ORIGINAL)

hulu



**“Movie: Sex Appeal”**

When her long-distance boyfriend hints at taking their relationship to the next level, a teen overachiever asks her longtime friend to be her test subject so she can master her sexuality in this teen comedy from Talia Osteen in her feature film directorial debut. Mika Abdalla, Jake Short, Mason Versaw, Paris Jackson and Margaret Cho head the cast. (ORIGINAL)

NETFLIX



**“The Journalist”**

From Japan comes this drama series that was adapted from the 2019 theatrical feature film of the same name and follows maverick reporter Anna Matsuda, (Ryoko Yonekura, “The Negotiator: The Movie”) as she strives to expose issues in modern Japanese society. Go Ayano, Ryusei Yokohama, Hidetaka Yoshioka and Shinobu Terajima also star. (ORIGINAL)

Disney



**“Betty White Goes Wild!” (Jan. 14)**

In celebration of the actress’s 100th birthday on Jan. 17, the streaming service comes forth with this documentary from National Geographic in which White heads to the zoos in Los Angeles and San Diego to gain an insight into the behavioral traits of big cats, their everyday lives and the challenges they face in the wild.