



SPORTS
GYMNASTS END YEAR IN STYLE AT SECTIONS
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Enterprise

Park Rapids

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'Starting over from scratch'

Donations sought so Rittgers can rebuild after house fire

By Lorie Skarpness
 Park Rapids Enterprise

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help the Joe and Jenny Rittgers' family after a house fire Sunday night left them without a place to call home.

They had been at a family member's home watching the Super Bowl and headed home around 8:30 p.m. to get the boys ready for bed.

"When we got home, my husband opened the door and smoke came rolling out," Jenny said.

"The hardest part was losing our cat, Tiger, and our dog, Lindy. We tried to save our dog and I got her to the Ark, but she had too extensive smoke inhalation. We can replace all kinds of things, but we sure did love our animals."

The family stayed with Joe's parents, Denise and Perry Rittgers of Nevis, Sunday night. "Our kids are super comfortable there and it feels like home," she said.

A family's cabin will provide temporary housing going forward.

"We're very fortunate that way," she said.

Both Joe and Jenny grew up in the community. Joe is a graduate of Nevis High School and Jenny (formerly Gravalin) of Park Rapids Area High School. The couple has two children. Bennet, 7, is in second grade at Nevis School and Hudson, 4,

How to help
 In addition to the GoFundMe page, monetary donations for the Rittgers Rebuild Fund may also be brought to the Nevis School or to Shelly Walsh at the Park Rapids Area High School office. Gift cards to area stores to help the family with replacing clothing and other items are also welcome.

attends preschool at Nevis.

Joe is a school resource/liaison officer at Park Rapids Schools and Jenny is the school nurse in Nevis.

Starting over

Jenny said due to extensive smoke damage in the home they will need to replace almost everything.

"We're starting over from scratch," she said.

In practical terms, that means everything from buying all the groceries needed for a family of four to replacing clothes, books and toys.

"Hudson really loves dinosaurs and Bennet loves football and basketball," she said.

As of Monday afternoon, almost \$10,000 of the \$50,000 goal for the "Help the Rittgers Rebuild" fund had been raised on the GoFundMe page.

"We have a hard time asking for help, but really appreciate it," Jenny said Monday. "We just are really

RITTGERS: Page 3



Contributed/ Jenny Rittgers

Joe and Jenny Rittgers of Nevis and their sons, Bennet and Hudson, are staying at a family cabin following a fire at their home Sunday night. A GoFundMe account has been set up to help the family.



Photos by Shannon Geisen / Enterprise

Kevin George playfully got all dolled up for Audrey's Purple Plunge, held Saturday in Akeley.

AKELEY'S ANSWER TO CANCER

Audrey's Purple Dream raises more than \$6,000

By Shannon Geisen
 Park Rapids Enterprise

Thirteen hearty souls plunged into 11th Crow Wing Lake on Saturday, cheered on by locals.

This was the 16th anniversary of Audrey's Purple Dream, held in honor of lifelong Akeley resident Audrey Pidde, who was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2004. Her dream was to take a trip to Alaska, but she passed away before that trip was realized.

This year's polar plungers raised around \$6,300, which will benefit area cancer patients.

Many paid tribute to their own loved ones who have or are fighting cancer.

Cynthia McGrath participated because "it's a wonderful cause. They've helped many of my friends." She raised \$660.

As she emerged with a curse word, she colorfully confirmed that the water was cold. Park Rapids DNR Fisheries staff estimated the lake temperature was 36 degrees. Meanwhile, the air temperature hit a high of 1 degree on Saturday, with wind chills dipping



Cynthia McGrath took the plunge, saying it was for a good cause. She thanked Audrey's Purple Dream for helping so many of her friends.

well below zero.

Randy Leritz of Park Rapids dove for the first time. He gathered \$120 for the cause. He did it in honor of Arnie Leritz, who died in Nov. 2021 from lymphoma.

"You can do it!" the crowd shouted.

When Randy hesitated, someone called out, "It's not getting any warmer!"

Brandy Vredenburg raised an impressive \$1,200 – and birthday wishes from the audience.

Kevin George, a

Park Rapids resident, jumped for Jerry Olson, who died of cancer last summer.

Laura Powers is queen of the polar plunge. She has participated every single year, in honor of Audrey, her mother and

ANSWER: Page 3

Deputy clerk's wages prompt Akeley special meeting

By Lorie Skarpness
 Park Rapids Enterprise

The Akeley City Council will hold a special meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 23 to discuss a possible pay increase for Deputy Clerk Kella Dunham.

Mayor Brian Hitchcock requested the special

meeting.

"With the pay equity thing, we are in compliance – that's definitely not a concern, but they noted that our deputy clerk is only making X amount of dollars and I'd like to see that increase, if possible," Hitchcock said. "Obviously, the

budget has already been sent and we're using it, but if we could find the money to do, that it would be great."

"Good help's hard to find, so we want to keep her," council member Dan Riggs said.

In other business, the council:

► Heard from Riggs that the city pier got hit by a vehicle. Police Chief Jimmy Hansen said he talked to the person who hit the pier owned by the DNR and maintained by the city, and the people responsible said they

MEETING: Page 3

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County considers simplified logo

By Shannon Geisen
Park Rapids Enterprise

County Administrator Jeff Cadwell presented options for scaling down the county's existing logo.

It currently incorporates seven colors, which is cumbersome to use and costly to reproduce, he explained at the Feb. 8 work session.

As part of the county's strategic communications plan, Cadwell said the county should establish graphic identity standards, such as typefaces, font size and color specifications.

"It's important in creating a brand," he said. "The original logo has seven colors, and it has the amount of detail that

really requires all seven colors to make it distinct and differentiate it."

Cadwell showed examples of the logo with only two, three, four or five colors. To accomplish this, details were removed from the loon, lake or tree. When the logo is reduced in size, say, for letterhead, those details are already lost,

he explained.

Cadwell said the original should be used when it isn't costly, but there are times where a one-color nameplate or a simplified color palette makes more sense. Public works vehicles could utilize the nameplate, for instance, while still keeping within the county's brand.



Shannon Geisen/Enterprise
County commissioners are looking creating simplified versions of the county's current, seven-color logo.

Without logo specifications, county departments are not uniformly using the logo online or in presentations, Cadwell continued.

The original logo was created around 2014.

He recommended a three- or four-color version. Cadwell said he would return with more samples and details.

Shannon Geisen can be reached at sgeisen@parkrapidsenterprise.com.

HUBBARD COUNTY INCIDENTS

From the Hubbard County dispatch blotter. Hubbard County incidents are also published online at parkrapidsenterprise.com.

Traffic: Dec. 11: An officer assisted State Patrol with a traffic stop; An SUV was reported driving with its blinker on for 3 miles and swerving from lane to lane; A vehicle was reported operating on a snowmobile trail; A caller made a driving complaint about a vehicle that turned south on State Hwy. 64; A snowmobiler was cited for having no trail pass;

Dec. 12: An officer assisted a motorist stopped in a turn lane, who had their own tow on the way; Officers assisted State Patrol with three traffic stops, including one on County 80; A driving complaint was reported; A Pontiac G6 with an obstructed plate was stopped;

Dec. 13: An officer assisted State Patrol with a traffic stop on U.S. Hwy. 71;

Dec. 14: Personnel removed a tree from the roadway; A truck was reported swerving all over the road; A U.S. Hwy. 71 caller near Itasca State Park reported following a truck with a propane tank and getting whiffs of propane; A caller reported a semi trailer parked in the roadway;

Dec. 15: A driving complaint was reported about a flatbed truck; A Ford Bronco went through a school bus arm when children were on the roadway; A crossover vehicle was reported varying in speed and swerving; A car was reported traveling east in the westbound lane; Personnel assisted State Patrol on a traffic stop; Personnel assisted State Patrol in Akeley;

Dec. 16: Minnesota Power requested traffic control due to a line down;

Dec. 18: Personnel assisted Beltrami County on a traffic stop;

Dec. 19: A vehicle was reported swerving and driving at high speed; A caller reported a car leading a long line of vehicles at speeds fluctuating between 35 and 40 mph, who kept tapping the brakes and was suspected to be intoxicated;

Dec. 20: A Laporte caller complained about kids doing doughnuts in the school parking lot after a girls basketball game when people were walking to their cars; Two vehicles were reported swerving all over the roadway and driving in the wrong lane.

Accidents: Dec. 21: A caller reported their Toyota Camry went into the ditch; An officer assisted with a vehicle off the roadway; A 159th Ave. caller reported a vehicle off the roadway;

Dec. 22: A caller reported a single-vehicle accident with no one around;

Dec. 23: A vehicle off the road was reported; A car slid into a ditch and hit a tree, but no injuries were reported;

Dec. 24: A squad car backed into a vehicle in Park Rapids and sustained damage;

Dec. 26: A one-vehicle accident was reported, with power lines down across the road, unknown injuries and smoke coming from the car; A Volkswagen Jetta was reported needing to be pulled out of the ditch; A U.S. Hwy. 71 caller reported his vehicle went off the road, rolled and came to rest on its passenger side, and caller was fine but needed a wrecker;

Dec. 27: A vehicle in the ditch was reported; A U.S. Hwy. 71 caller reported a vehicle in the ditch with occupants still inside; An officer assisted with a snowmobile rollover;

Dec. 28: A multiple-vehicle accident with injuries was reported when a semi jackknifed;

A caller reported a single vehicle in the ditch, with a tow already en route; A two-vehicle accident was reported with no injuries and one vehicle fully in the ditch; A Lake George caller reported a car off the road, occupied but with no injuries; A U.S. Hwy. 71 caller reported a vehicle in the ditch after a rear-ending accident; A three-vehicle accident was reported; A truck and a fish house reportedly went into the ditch and took out some signs, and a tow was en route; A vehicle off the road was reported; A snowmobiler hit a green box near the south transfer station in Park Rapids; Another vehicle off the road was reported; A squad vehicle was rear-ended; An officer assisted with a vehicle off the roadway;

Dec. 30: A caller reported a vehicle that rolled over ended up on its side in the ditch with two dogs aboard, but no injuries; A vehicle was reported stuck partially off the road; Chrysler van was reported in the ditch;

Dec. 31: A one-vehicle rollover with no injuries was reported; A car reportedly hit a stop sign, with no injuries; An officer responded to a vehicle off the road; A caller reported his Infiniti G35 slid off the road and would be towed the next day; A County 40 caller reported a vehicle off the roadway.

Animal Related: Dec. 21: A caller reported a deer that was hit by a vehicle was wandering around in traffic, and caller was concerned that someone would hit it; An Akeley caller complained that their neighbor's dog was on their property;

Dec. 22: A Todd Twp. caller reported her 3-year-old yellow Lab ran away, not wearing a collar; A 139th Ave. caller complained about neighbors' dogs on caller's property; Four horses were reported out on the roadway; A Park Rapids caller reported a deer hit by a vehicle needed to be dispatched, and another person wanted a possession tag;

Dec. 24: A caller reported a deer needing to be dispatched;

Dec. 25: A deer was reported struggling on the side of the road, needing to be dispatched;

Dec. 27: An 8-month-old pit-bull-Yorkie-Lab mix was reported lost nearly five hours after being let outside;

Dec. 28: A Hubbard Twp. caller renewed a previous report of possible dog neglect; A County 12 caller reported a stray dog at their residence;

Dec. 29: A caller reported

finding a car-hit deer and requested a possession tag; A Nevis caller reported a Chevrolet Silverado had been turned off for 45 minutes with a dog inside;

Dec. 30: An adult, long-haired, orange cat with no tags was reported missing since Dec. 28; A caller reported having a dog in her vehicle that kept running across the roadway; A deer in the ditch was reported, needing to be dispatched.

Assaults/Harassment: Dec. 21: A 210th St. caller said her son and her grandson were in an altercation on Dec. 18;

Dec. 25: A County 31 caller reported domestic abuse; A 500th St. caller reported receiving threats from her ex-boyfriend;

Dec. 26: A 500th St. caller reported being slapped in the face by his fiancée;

Dec. 28: Red Lake Health requested agency assistance in Helga Twp. when a person being transported to another health facility began making threats and getting out of control;

Dec. 29: A Farden Twp. caller reported issues with her boyfriend, who was throwing her things into the yard; A 344th St. caller reported someone was threatening to post pictures online; A Lakeport Twp. caller reported receiving numerous threatening calls in a row;

Dec. 30: A caller at the Cass County line reported a trespasser harassing a tow company employee and refusing to leave the impound lot;

Dec. 31: A 229th Ave. caller reported a male would not let her leave the residence, blocking the driveway with his four-wheeler and screwing the front door shut; The owner of a towing company at the Cass County line wanted an officer present while she released a vehicle to a male who was hostile to her on Dec. 30 to ensure he remains civil; Becker County requested assistance in Osage with a male in a Carsonville rescue vehicle who was being uncooperative and would not get out of the vehicle.

Burglaries/Theft: Dec. 22: A residential burglar alarm was activated in Thorpe Twp.; A living room motion alarm was activated in Thorpe Twp.; A U.S. Hwy. 2 caller reported her vehicle was stolen from her residence overnight; An interior upstairs motion alarm was tripped in Mantrap Twp.;

Dec. 23: An alarm was accidentally tripped in Mantrap Twp.;

Dec. 24: A bunk house door alarm and a garage alarm were activated in Straight River Twp.;

Dec. 25: A 279th Ave. caller reported the theft of fuel; A 200th St. caller reported a male trespasser trying to break into caller's shed;

Dec. 27: A caller reported losing a snowblower out of the back of his truck and suspected someone stopped and took it near Portage Lake;

Dec. 28: A Nevis caller reported a possible scam after receiving a ticket from Wisconsin when they had never been to Wisconsin;

Dec. 29: Residential, bunk house and garage alarms were activated in Straight River Twp.; A pole barn service door alarm was activated on County 37;

Dec. 30: Clay County inquired about a Toyota Prius stolen from Dilworth that caller believed could be at the Walmart parking lot in Park Rapids.

Fires: Dec. 21: A hallway smoke detector went off in Lake Emma Twp., and a contractor said dust set it off;

Dec. 22: A Nevis area caller reported his house was on fire;

Dec. 24: A possible structure fire was reported in Park Rapids; A Becker County 44 caller reported firewood burning by an outdoor stove;

Dec. 30: An Island Lake caller reported a fish house at the public access of U.S. Hwy. 71 was catching fire and caller was concerned a propane tank may explode;

Dec. 31: A Farden Twp. caller reported hearing what sounded like fireworks and when she looked, her meter was sparking.

Medical: Dec. 21: An ambulance was requested on 414th St. for a female who fell and couldn't get up;

Dec. 22: An ambulance was requested in Akeley for a 72-year-old female who recently had hip surgery, possibly having a urinary tract infection;

Dec. 23: An ambulance was requested on 150th St. for a 94-year-old male having trouble breathing; An ambulance was requested in Henrietta Twp. for a female who fell during the night and was now in pain and couldn't get out of bed; An ambulance was requested in Akeley for a female who recently had a hip replacement, in pain with a possible urinary tract infection;

Dec. 24: An ambulance was requested on 410th St. for a male having a stroke; An ambulance was requested on County

44 for a female who passed out and had low blood pressure and slow pulse;

Dec. 25: A lift assist was requested in Lake Emma Twp. for an 80-year-old male; An ambulance was requested in Lake Emma Twp. for a female with a history of seizures who woke up and started screaming; A medical alarm was activated on County 2 but there was no voice contact with subscriber; An ambulance was requested for caller's grandparent whose oxygen levels were low, as caller pulled over in a truck with hazards on to begin CPR;

Dec. 26: An ambulance was requested due to stomach pain, possibly food poisoning; An ambulance was requested in Todd Twp. for a female vomiting and having cold sweats and trouble breathing; An ambulance was requested on 200th St. for an elderly male who was too weak to get to the car; An ambulance was requested at the jail in Park Rapids; An ambulance was requested in Akeley for a male having a seizure;

Dec. 27: A County 18 caller requested an ambulance for her husband, who was speaking gibberish, possibly due to a stroke or seizure;

Dec. 28: An ambulance was requested on County 3 for a male possibly having a stroke; An ambulance was requested in Crow Wing Lake Twp. for a male having trouble breathing;

Dec. 29: A an ambulance was requested in Akeley for an elderly female who was very weak and could not get up; An ambulance was requested on 165th Ave. for an epileptic 10-year-old who had been in seizures for the past seven minutes;

Dec. 30: An ambulance was requested on County 118 for a possible heart attack; An ambulance was requested in Todd Twp. for a female possibly having a heart attack;

Dec. 31: An ambulance was requested for a 72-year-old female who was very cold and

having a severe nosebleed.

Miscellaneous: Dec. 22: A business check was conducted in Nevis; A 139th Ave. caller reported catching trespassers on a trail camera; A Todd Twp. caller wanted personnel to check on a camper and a carport after seeing trespassers on a webcam; An officer checked on a suspicious vehicle; Personnel were requested to remove a male from a home in Park Rapids;

Dec. 23: A business check was conducted in Nevis; A County 31 caller complained that furniture had been sitting for over a month awaiting pickup but caller couldn't contact the other person because of a restraining order; A 410th St. caller had questions about property retrieval;

Dec. 24: An officer was flagged down in the Lake George area; An Arago Twp. caller had questions about neighbors shooting guns in the area; A County 30 caller complained about someone not picking up their property for over a week; An officer checked out a suspicious vehicle; A caller reported hearing seven gunshots on the north side of Dorset;

Dec. 25: An officer checked on a suspicious vehicle; A Pine River caller complained that her husband wouldn't return their daughter;

Dec. 26: A 229th Ave. caller complained about excessive shooting; Personnel assisted Cass County officers at an address on the Hubbard side of the county line;

Dec. 27: A County 13 caller who was snowed in reported a child exchange issue; A Lake Emma Twp. caller requested officer assistance getting her husband into a wheelchair, then the car, for a doctor's appointment; A Nevis caller requested help with a custody issue; A Lake Alice Twp. caller reported a mailbox taken out by a plow; A Laporte caller reported her children weren't returned on Dec. 26;

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Laura Powers is the longest standing polar plunger. She has participated every year since 2005. Shannon Geisen / Enterprise

MEETING

From Page 1

would pay for the damages. Work will have to wait until spring.

► Approved the new Akeley City Park campground managers contract with Bernie and Carol Penner as presented.

► Tabled the purchase of a new steel lift gate for the city's white pickup. The lift gate is a hydraulic tailgate that opens up and will be used to move heavy items and can also load sandbags. The city asked Watson to provide at least two quotes that include the labor cost as provided by city policy, since the cost is over \$500.

► Discussed paying the Eastern Hubbard County Fire District (EHCDF) equipment fund and protection contract money as previously approved.

► Heard the EHCDF is looking for more firefighters.

► Approved paying Moore Engineering invoices for work on the Akeley Community Projects Committee in the amount of \$1,140 and \$5,426 from money set aside in their account.

► Approved the calcium chloride contract for the city at a cost of \$2,991 after discussing the more expensive alternative product of DuraBlend used by the county.

► Heard the audit field work for the city has been completed.

► Tabled sending a letter to residents requesting fundraising for the Akeley Community Projects Committee. A revised draft of the letter will be brought to the council next month.

► Heard Hansen attended training earlier this month.

► Heard the water/sewer/maintenance report from Reid Watson.

► Heard the Local Board of Appeals and Equalization meeting will be held at 11:30 a.m. April 26.

The next regular council meeting will be held at 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 9 at city hall.

Lorie Skarpness can be reached at lskarpness@parkrapidsenterprise.com

ANSWER

From Page 1

has participated every year since 2011.

"The reason I know is because his grandma passed away that year," she said.

Morgan Monroe was the youngest local participant. She was the only one under 18. This was her fourth year raising money to help cancer patients with their medical expenses. Kaia Dunham, also

from Akeley, has plunged for 14 years. Audrey was her mother.

Fishing tourney results

The fishing tournament, also held on Saturday, attracted 223 contestants. They caught a total of 208 fish – 206 of them being perch.

Twenty-three prizes were awarded, with

\$1,000 given to the 16th place fish. That winner was Marly Lehn, who reeled in a 7-ounce perch.

Keith Torma took first place with his 1-pound, 14.5-ounce bass. Josh Severson placed second. He caught a 1-pound, 6-ounce walleye.

Amery Ruffin of St. Cloud won the raffle's grand prize, a 2022 Ice

Castle RV Edition.

The Akeley Ice Racing Club donated \$500 toward Audrey's Purple Dream. Twenty racers dashed around the circular track on Saturday.

Music, awards and a silent auction at the Red River Event Center concluded this year's event.

Shannon Geisen can be reached at sgeisen@parkrapidsenterprise.com.

RITTGERS

From Page 1

the fire was. We saw an orange glow in the window and sent crews in and they knocked that down pretty quickly. A couple minutes, really. It had extended into the main level as well, and they knocked that down pretty quickly, too, using a minimal amount of water, which obviously helps with the integrity of the building. In one room in the basement, the ceiling is burned and the adjacent floor above that is burned."

A handheld device showed where a hot spot was.

"We just got one to test it out and I think we're probably going to get more," Carlson said. "It shows differences in temperatures from outside the building. Instead of trying to guess where the fire is when we go in the door, we can know where it is."

Carlson said the homeowners got the dog out before they arrived on scene.

Carlson has been trained in Basic Animal Rescue Techniques, including how to give animals oxygen. The fire crew searched

for the cat, but it was deceased when they found it.

"Unfortunately, we weren't able to find the cat in time," he said.

After the fire was under control, they stayed to make sure there weren't any flare ups.

"We ventilated to get the smoke out of the building, putting fans in the basements, made sure we had every

bit of the fire out so it wouldn't rekindle," he said. "Then we closed up all the windows to protect the property as best as we could."

Carlson said when the weather is cold like it was Sunday night, there are extra challenges for firefighters.

"We need to keep water flowing in the nozzles, so the hoses don't freeze even when we're not using them,"

he said. "We also rotate our people. When they are in a hot environment fighting the fire, they get sweaty, and then once outside get cold pretty quick, so we make sure they can get in a vehicle. Everything went very smoothly, everyone acted very professionally and I was very proud of them."

Lorie Skarpness can be reached at lskarpness@parkrapidsenterprise.com



HOME IMPROVEMENTS ELIGIBLE FOR TAX BREAKS OR REBATES

Installation of insulation and other energy-saving products could make you eligible for a tax rebate.

Homeowners often look to make improvements to their homes to improve aesthetics, save money or make their homes more energy efficient. What they may not know is that certain home improvements may qualify them for manufacturer or energy supplier rebates and even federal tax credits that can help a person save even more.

Not all products are eligible each year, so it's beneficial to know what tax incentives are out there regarding home retrofits. Here are some programs to keep in mind. Installation and replacement of biomass stoves, HVAC systems, insulation, metal and asphalt roofs, non-solar water heaters, and windows/doors can earn a person up to 10 percent of the cost, up to \$500, or a specific amount from \$50 to \$300. Improvements must have been done to an existing home and principal residence by the end of the tax year.

Federal tax credits for 2012 include geothermal heat pumps. These are similar to ordinary heat pumps, but use the ground instead of outside air to provide heating, air conditioning and, in most cases, hot water. Use of small residential wind turbines, and solar energy systems, including solar water heaters and photovoltaic panels, are also eligible.

These tax credits offer 30 percent of the cost of the renovation with no upper limit. Visit Energy.gov/savings to determine any additional rebate and savings programs that may be offered in your state.

Homeowners looking to do improvements can go online or consult with a tax professional to determine which

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