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Enterprise

Park Rapids

Saturday, April 23, 2022

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Contributed / Park Rapids Area High School

Some of the students from PRAHS doing their clinicals at Heritage Living Center were, front from left, Tarynn Arola, Amelia Berg, Mickey Clark, Abby Morris; back row, Kelsey Berghuis, Simone Wolff, Sophie Dewinter, Natalie Harvey and instructor Tia Kocka.

County gives another \$1M to Heritage

By Shannon Geisen
 Park Rapids Enterprise

Hubbard County commissioners voted to use \$1 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to offset pandemic-related losses at the county-owned nursing facility.

In 2021, they allocated an additional \$1 million of ARP to Heritage Living Campus.

County Administrator Jeff Cadwell reviewed Heritage's financial position for the first and second quarter, noting its fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Over the first six months of the current fiscal year, Heritage campus is showing an operational loss of \$1,139,794.

County trial balances are showing a \$886,665 loss and a total fund deficit of \$1,777,538 for the first six months of the current fiscal year.

"This is to place into context the question if and how much the board wants to allocate the balance of ARP funds," he said.

Compared to 2019, Cadwell said the three funds - Heritage Living Center, Heritage Manor and The Cottages - are seeing operating revenue losses of \$300,000 per month.

"With \$300,000 per month times six months, we're at \$1.8 million. When you actually look at the numbers the loss is less because our expenses are lower because we don't have the staff to carry the occupancy, so we're at \$1.13, but it does appear that there's a revenue loss greater than \$1 million in the first six months of operating," he continued. "It might make sense to use ARP funds to fill that gap, because if we don't, we're going to end up using some other county source at some point."

Hubbard County was allocated \$4,174,375 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, a part of ARP. Half was awarded in May 2021, and the second half will be received this May, according to Cadwell.

Cadwell said there is \$1 million in the ARP fund.

Heritage Administrator Kurt Hansen reiterated that the initial reduction in revenue was pandemic-related, due to the drop in occupancy.

"What's happened since, as we've gotten into this fiscal year, people are coming back, but we just don't have the workforce to support the levels of patients that are required to make back that revenue," he said. "I know we're not alone in that. Everybody's struggling with it. Obviously, we're more public about it because we're a public entity."

Hansen continued, "The only way we can dig ourselves out of this is if we can gain an appreciable amount of staff to meet our residents' needs safely and then be able to take more residents in."

HANDS-ON HELP

CNA program helping meet critical nursing shortage

By Lorie Skarpness
 Park Rapids Enterprise

Students from Park Rapids and Nevis high schools had hands-on experience caring for nursing home residents during their recent clinicals at Ecumen-Heritage Living Center in Park Rapids.

Heritage Living Center's executive director Kurt Hansen said he hopes these students will help ease the nursing shortage.

"What school districts like Nevis and Park Rapids are providing these students is a face-to-face look at health care jobs," he said. "Clinical experience is a critical component to becoming certified as a nursing assistant. Some students may even go on to greater health care opportunities here and elsewhere."



Contributed / Tia Kockac

Tarynn Arola assisted resident Jeannie Walsh during her clinicals at Heritage Living Center. Arola, a senior at PRAHS, is also an employee at Heritage where she works after school. She is also planning to continue working there this summer.

Desperate for staff

Hansen said both residents and staff were reduced during the beginning of the pandemic.

Unwinding New Market Tax Credits

In related business, the board approved lease amendments to effectively cancel leases put in place to secure the New Market Tax Credits for Heritage Center improvements, pending final attorney review.

Cadwell explained, "Just to clarify, back in 2014 when the county was pursuing New Market Tax Credits, there was a nonprofit structure that was created in order to qualify for and hold those new market tax credits. In December 2021, those New Market Tax Credits were unwound, meaning that

County buys 46 acres for Itasca-Heartland Connection Trail

By Shannon Geisen
 Park Rapids Enterprise

The Hubbard County Board agreed to purchase 46 acres from The Conservation Fund (TCF).

The proposed route of the Itasca-Heartland Connection Trail passes through this parcel, located northwest of Emmaville in Clay Township.

TCF is a nonprofit organization that strives to preserve land as working forest, conservation land or public recreation-

land.

Land Commissioner Mark "Chip" Lohmeier explained to the board at their April 19 meeting, "This is part of the larger 600-acre tract that the Trust for Public Lands is acquiring and would donate to the county."

Trust For Public Lands (TPL) - a national, nonprofit land conservation organization - has Lesard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) funding to purchase 554 acres of former Potlatch land from TCF.

Lohmeier reminded the board that this 46-parcel was split off from the TPL acquisition because LSOHC prohibits use of its funding to buy land that will be developed into recreational trails.

"We're looking at purchasing this separately using county funds, then we can put the trail on there without restrictions," Lohmeier said.

He reported TCF is looking to complete this real estate transaction in the same time frame (June 15) as TPL will be acquiring the adjoining 554 acres.

TCF offered to sell the 46 acres for \$66,249, with a \$1,000 deposit and closing date of June 15 or earlier.

According to Lohmeier, the current assessed value of the land is approximately \$1,665 per acre. TCF is offering land at approximately \$1,438 per acre, giving the county a savings of over \$10,000.

Once the parcel is acquired, Lohmeier said the county could complete a Class B land exchange with itself using tax-forfeited

lands for the exchange. The tax-forfeited status would then transfer to the parcel acquired from TCF and the county could sell the other tax-forfeited parcel. This would make the acquired parcel eligible for payment in lieu of taxes. Parcels involved in a Class B land exchange must be largely of the same value, Lohmeier reported.

In other business, the board did as follows:

- Accepted the low quote for 2022 noxious weed spraying from B&P Weed Control of Bemidji in the amount of \$37,523. The quote includes application of herbicide along 173 miles of various county roads. Hubbard County Public Works Coordinator Jed Nordin said this will cover the northern one-third of the county, adding this contract will free up Hubbard County Agriculture Inspector Greg Hensel's time so he can spray more townships. Nordin noted that the county's one natural preservation route, on CSAH 37 by Kabekona Lake, will not be sprayed so that native flowers are not killed.
- Accepted the low quote of \$72,115 from Sir Lines-a-Lot of Edina for the annual pavement marking contract.
- Approved the \$12,545 purchase of Canon large-format plotter/scanner/copier for the county highway, survey and natural resource management departments. The contract is with Sheldon Business Solutions, LLC of Duluth.

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PR School Board terminates probationary teacher

By Robin Fish
Park Rapids Enterprise

The Park Rapids School Board approved a resolution Tuesday terminating the probationary contract of high school vocal music teacher Lucas Ford, effective at the end of the school year, and declining to renew his contract for the next year.

The resolution included notice advising Ford of his right to request information about why his contract was terminated.

High School Principal Jeff Johnson sought the school board's consent to add Panther Tracks medals and cords for community service, including military service, to seniors' graduation gear. Board members raised no objections.

School leadership also discussed end-of-year testing, elementary field trips, registration for next year's early childhood programs and kindergarten classes, and preparations to pack and move classrooms from the Frank White Education Center to Century School and within the Century building.

School board member Dennis Dodge reported that the North Country Vocational Co-op Center is extending eligibility for Perkins grant awards down to fifth grade.

Dodge also discussed the co-op's plans to provide equipment requested by teachers, safety training for career and technical

education teachers and CTE licensure, and discussion about a rise in student discipline problems that has led to higher rates of teacher burnout.

In consent items and general business, the school board:

▶ Approved a casual labor rate increase to \$15 per hour.

▶ Accepted the resignations of Katie Buckholtz as a high school English teacher and Josh Grev as an elementary special education teacher, both effective at the end of the school year, and Jason Haas as a junior varsity boys basketball coach.

▶ Hired Charlotte Gruis as a special diets cook, Eva Gruis as a 6.25-hour/day cook's helper, Andy Campbell as an assistant varsity football coach and Olivia Leslie as a middle school autism spectrum disorders teacher contingent upon licensure, all effective with the 2022-23 school year.

▶ Hired Lindsey Trompeter as an elementary secretary, effective May 9; David Synstegaard as a transportation supervisor, effective May 16; and Ellie Riihiluoma as head volleyball coach.

▶ Approved volunteers Brooke Jerger as a softball coach and Jason Haas as a baseball coach.

▶ Approved a leave of absence without pay for middle school teacher Bryan Hirt during the 2022-23 school year.

▶ Acknowledged members of the Esports team who recently competed in their league's state tournament.

▶ Approved a first reading of an assistant principal job description. Superintendent Lance Bagstad said there were 14 external and two internal applicants for the position.

▶ Approved a first reading of the Century Adventures handbook and the second reading of an intervenor, American Sign Language certified interpreter and language facilitator job description.

▶ Received an enrollment review, showing that enrollment remained about the same from March 16 to April 13, totaling 1,576 students in grades K-12 and 1,729 students districtwide.

▶ Acknowledged the donation of a carpet from Executive Interiors to Century Elementary for the winter PE unit.

▶ Approved payments presented for April, totaling \$1,399,919.

▶ Approved a quarterly student activities report, showing revenues totaling \$62,098 and expenses totaling \$47,515 from January through March.

The school board's next meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. Monday, May 2 at the Frank White Education Center.

Robin Fish can be reached at rfish@parkrapidsenterprise.com.

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Menahga allocated \$231,250 from Wadena County ARP funds

By Shannon Geisen
Park Rapids Enterprise

The Menahga City Council received notice from the Wadena County Board that \$231,250 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds have been set aside for the city.

The funds will be used to offset the cost of a new 100,000-gallon water tower, estimated at \$1,117,500.

County commissioners awarded \$135,250 each to the cities of Sebeka, Staples and Verndale. The city of Wadena is set to receive \$575,000.

The council approved the ARP application form completed by Interim City Administrator Betty Thomsen and authorized her to respond to any further inquiries from the county.

Thomsen said the council should have passed a resolution formally accepting \$142,285 in ARP from the U.S. Department of Treasury.

"That was never done, so this resolution that was handed out tonight was taken from the

League of Minnesota Cities," she explained at the April 11 meeting. She added the federal ARP funds can be used for infrastructure as well.

The city received the first half - \$68,887 - in July 2021. The second half is expected to arrive in July 2022.

Greenwood Connections

Greenwood Connections Administration Laura Ahlf shared that Greenwood Connections has hired 18 nurses in the past few months, "so that's good. There's a couple positions open."

Ahlf noted that Greenwood Connections will continue to pay new certified nursing aides a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, if they are guaranteed hours and working every other weekend and at least one day each week. The bonuses were being paid with Minnesota Department of Human Services emergency grant funds, but the nursing facility will pay them going forward.

To date, Ahlf said

\$3,000 of \$16,000 had been awarded. The remainder is paid out based on accrued work hours, she explained.

A Minnesota Department of Health survey of Woodside Manor Assisted Living went "really well." Ahlf said only four items needed correction, while the state average is 16.

Council member Art Huebner repeated his question from last month, asking what occupancy rate is needed to break even.

Ahlf reiterated it's 80%. Huebner repeated his concern from last month about the facility making its bond payments.

Ahlf explained, again, that S&P Global report only reviews audit reports, which don't include the city-owned facility's Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) actuarial accruals. It's not money that comes out of the facility's bottom line or cash flow; it's an estimate, she said, adding Greenwood Connections

showed a "loss" for a couple years because of PERA estimates.

Ahlf said S&P Global also takes out depreciation, which doesn't affect cash flow, either.

Ahlf confirmed Greenwood Connections will be able to make its bond payments.

In other business, the council adopted the Minnesota Mayors Handbook as the city council bylaws. They added language that all requests to place an item on the agenda must be received by the city administrator by noon on the Wednesday preceding the council meeting. Agenda packets will be delivered to council members at least three days prior to the meeting. A simple majority of three will constitute a quorum.

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

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SANFORD HEALTH

EHCFD and Nevis respond to house fire in Akeley



Firefighters from the Eastern Hubbard County Fire District and the Nevis Fire Department responded to this house fire at 50 Pleasant Ave. SE in Akeley at 7:53 p.m. Wednesday, April 20. According to EHCFD assistant chief Billy Krotzer, they cleared the scene around 1 a.m. Thursday and returned later Thursday morning to spray water on an area that was smoldering. "I can't really give any more info further than that at this time," Krotzer said.

Contributed / Billy Krotzer

NURSING

From Page 1

"People left the healthcare field and many are not coming back," he said. "We have adequate staff to take care of the people we have, but we can't take in more because we don't have the workers. A lot of places are struggling with that. It's both licensed nurses and certified nursing assistants (CNAs). If we had more positions filled, that would allow us to take in more local residents and meet their short- and long-term care needs. To get to where we want to go in the next step of recovering back (after COVID) between our nursing home and assisted living, we could hire 7.5 full-time equivalent positions."

Hansen said they pay for training and all associated expenses in addition to providing scholarships and tuition assistance.

"And we have flexible shifts, especially for our high school students, times when extra hands are needed," he said.

Heritage director of nursing Joan Wilken said, due to the staff shortage, some families have had to move family members to nursing homes in other communities and travel to Bemidji or Fargo to visit them.

"The first floor here currently has 31 residents, but we're licensed for 64 residents," she said. "Our whole upstairs is empty. I could fill this building with residents tomorrow. It's the staff I don't have."

On-the-job training
A total of 10 students

from Nevis High School and 12 students from Park Rapids Area High School (PRAHS) are enrolled in CNA programs.

Nevis students completed their clinical training earlier this month and Park Rapids students began their clinicals this week.

Wilken set up and supervised the clinicals, which began with a day of orientation followed by two days helping care for residents.

"They get a facility tour and orientation to our electronic medical records system," Wilken said. "We selected 10 residents for them to work with ahead of time."

For their clinicals, students do many things they would do as a CNA, with assistance from regular staff.

Wilken said the most important quality in a CNA is caring about taking care of other people. "It starts by the desire to help someone," she said.

"Students help residents with bathing, dressing and toileting, escort them to meals and therapy and help with activities. Some students do more watching the first day, but by the second day they are responsible to help care for the resident with our staff's supervision."

Wilken said staff feedback following student clinicals was positive. "It gives the residents extra attention," she said. "We need young people in this industry in order to care for the Baby Boomer population."

Following their clinicals, students are required to pass a written exam and hands-on skill training test before becoming

qualified as a CNA.

A possible career path

Tarynn Arola is a senior at PRAHS who is employed at Heritage while completing her CNA.

"I work as much as I can," she said. "They're so short of staff, so I get called in pretty often and average about 10 hours a week. I also work at Knute Nelson."

She will take her CNA test on May 5.

Arola said she signed up for CNA just to see what it was like. "It sparked an interest in me," she said. "For college, I'm looking at going to the University of Minnesota and majoring in psychology, but my second option is something to do with nursing. They have Ecumen programs in Minneapolis, too, so I'm hoping to transfer there and work part-time while going to school."

Arola said helping people with what they are not capable of doing any more is what she likes best about working with the older population.

She also enjoys interacting with them at activities like bingo and getting to know them. "When you spend so much time helping them, you spark up a conversation and get to know them really well," she said.

She said she has also learned to deal with behaviors the residents sometimes have that stem from anger or sadness. "You put yourself in their shoes," she said.

Emily Funk is a junior at Nevis School who is looking into a career as a registered nurse.

"The kind of a caregiver I aspire to

be is one who not only cares for the patients, but also cares about them," she said. "The most rewarding part of working with the elderly is seeing the impact I can make on their lives to bring them a better quality of life. My favorite part of the clinical experience was getting to know the residents."

Looking to the future

Tia Kocka coordinates the CNA program for PRAHS. She said next year they are hoping to have 20 students in the CNA class.

"I am thankful for the partnership our school has with Heritage Living Center," she said. "It is an incredible gift for the students to be able to attend clinicals and learn so close to home. The staff and residents were very welcoming during our clinical rotations and eager to help our students learn. I am hopeful that after clinicals and taking their state exam, some students will pursue employment at our area healthcare facilities."

Jenny Rittgers, who started and coordinated the CNA program for Nevis School, also wants to expand their program.

"As a first year program for Nevis School, this group has been excellent to work with," she said. "Being able to be a part of helping develop caregivers is an honor. We will continue to grow our program with some grant dollars we received. I am hopeful that Nevis School will be building future health care workers for years to come."

Lorie Skarpness can be reached at lskarpness@parkrapidsenterprise.com

OUTDOOR BRIEF

Free kids fishing seminar

Learn about fishing from two of the area's most experienced fishermen: Jason Durham and TJ Erickson. The fifth annual kids fishing seminar begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday, April

25. Admission is free. All kids receive a prize. Stop and see an interactive darkhouse experience. This event is sponsored by the Park Rapids chapter of the Minnesota Darkhouse and Angling Association.

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HERITAGE

From Page 1

\$4.5 to \$5 million in tax credits was forgiven and written off. What we're doing now is dismantling the nonprofit agency and the agreements that were created for the New Market Tax Credits because they serve no purpose."

This process put the property and title back to "being clear and in the ownership of Hubbard County," he said.

According to Cadwell, all interests in the mortgage put in place to secure the New Market Tax Credits have been satisfied and transferred back to the county. The balance of debt for the Heritage Center improvements in 2015 are in the form of general obligation bonds held by the county that do not require any security.

In December 2021, the board hired Senior Living Investment Brokerage to assist with the sale of the facility, pending attorney review.

"The attorney review has been ongoing. One of the statutory requirements that the county has is to actually list the property for sale ourselves in the local newspaper before we can contract with a brokerage firm," Cadwell explained.

The board authorized posting a notice listing the property for sale for the next three weeks, then executing the brokerage agreement.

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

TRAIL

From Page 1

► Reviewed results of April 11 timber auction, where 10 tracts sold for \$390,336. Lohmeier reported that the total value of all timber sold so far in 2022 is \$794,070. This is approximately an \$84,000 increase in value of timber sold at this point in time last

year. "And last year was a pretty good year. Trends are in the right direction," Lohmeier said.

► Accepted low quote of \$2,438 from Potty Shacks of Park Rapids for renting four Porta-Potty units. The units will be located at the Stony Lake and Garfield Lake swimming beaches and at the south Long Lake access and Fish Hook Lake access.

► Authorized participation in a regional project to study the future of demolition landfill management and committed up to \$15,000. Hubbard County Solid Waste Administrator Josh Holte said nine counties, including Hubbard, applied for a grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for the project, but it was denied. The counties decided to

move ahead using county dollars for the \$133,050 study.

► Approved an order to Allen and Mary Scheider to remove a hazardous building at 15699 Dakota Shores Drive on Long Lake. The county determined the former cabin is dilapidated and in disrepair.

► Approved the hire of a Social Services supervisor (adult services).

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