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Gene Baland named grand marshal of the 150th Linwood Days

Former Linwood Elementary principal named for contributions to community

Natalie Ryder
Community Editor

Gene Baland, a beloved former principal of Linwood Elementary, who started the Linwood Community Park and School Forest, is set to be the grand marshal of the parade at the 150th Linwood Days celebration. The festivities will commence on Tuesday, Sept. 7, and conclude on Saturday, Sept. 11.

Born and raised in Victoria, Minnesota, Gene Baland currently lives in White Bear Lake, but raised his kids in Forest Lake while he was the principal of Linwood Elementary for 31 years.

Diane Selz, treasurer of the Linwood Community Park and School Forest Committee, called Baland about a month ago to offer him the grand marshal position for the upcoming annual parade.

Selz was on the first school forest committee when Baland started it in the mid-1990s. She highlighted his contributions to the community by starting the school forest and its lasting legacy, which is still present today.

"What a nice honor," Baland said about being the grand marshal.

He's excited for the



Photo by Natalie Ryder

Gene Baland at his apartment overlooking White Bear Lake, his current residence after selling his home on Lake Vermilion. Even though he is in the age group to move into a senior living apartment, he said it keeps him young to live in a place with young working professionals.

parade that will have about 17 participants. It has been about 20 years since he has seen former students of Linwood Elementary and their parents at a big community event.

Baland said, "It'll be interesting to see if I recognize them, and if I don't I hope they come up and introduce themselves again."

"So many of my former students contact me on Facebook, and I look at their pictures and go, 'Wow, is that that little sixth grader I used to chase around because he wasn't behaving?'" he joked.

Baland remembers the fun times of being the principal, like getting dropped in the freezing dunk tank during a

school carnival, which he never did again, the rewards of seeing former students enroll their children at the school, and teaching in general: to see the "light bulb turn on in a kid's head."

Legacy in Linwood

Baland was hired to be the principal of Linwood Elementary in 1968

and held that position for 31 years. At the time he started, there were only seven classrooms and when he left there were four classrooms for each grade level and about 650 kids enrolled.

Baland additionally established the 170-acre Linwood Community Park and School Forest during his time at the elementary school in the

mid-1990s. The park is still being overseen by a committee of teachers, parents and town board members, as intended at its origin.

"I got a note, a letter, in the mail from Anoka County. And it said there is 170 acres that's tax forfeit. ... I don't know if it was a mistake that I got it

Baland see page 2

The pandemic's reach into the car industry

How car shortages are affecting local dealers and consumers

Natalie Ryder
Community Editor

It has been over a year since the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States in March 2020, affecting industries across the country when the economy took a downturn. The car industry was affected at that time and continues to impact consumers today.

Some members in the industry predict that the car market won't rebound to its pre-pandemic normalcy for at least another 6-12 months, although they say it is difficult to forecast. However for the time being, customers should expect waiting longer for their desired vehicle, elevated prices on used and new cars,

along with good trade-in deals for used vehicles and low interest rates.

The consensus among dealership owners to car salesmen is that they have never experienced anything like this right now.

"It cuts across every brand, make and model. ... It does not discriminate," said Scott Lambert, president of the Minnesota Auto Dealers Association.

Steve Whitaker, president of Whitaker Buick GMC in Forest Lake, said his dealership would typically have 100 new and 100 used vehicles on display on their lot prior to the pandemic. His current inventory is 16 new and 50 used vehicles. His dealership tries to accommodate customers' vehicle needs by searching other dealerships' inventory and making "dealer trades" with them. However, the process takes more time

Cars see page 3

Fly-in brings area aviation aficionados to Forest Lake



A fly-in took place at the Forest Lake airport, and the new business Hanger 97, on Saturday, Aug. 21.

Submitted photos



Sports



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Two of a kind: Friends win fishing title

NLA junior part of second straight tourney victory

John Wagner
Sports Editor

The friendship of Charlie Weiss and Erik Panyan is a credit to Charlie's mother.

"A few years ago, me and my brother were setting up a badminton net at McKinley Park Campground," Panyan said. "And suddenly his mom dragged him over to us and said, 'This is Charlie, I want you to be friends.' I guess she was tired of him just sitting around."

Weiss confirmed the story, adding: "My mom basically dragged me up the hill and made me play with Erik, who now is my good friend. We were shy at first, but we had a lot of things in common."

"Since that time, we've always camped together, gone fishing and gone biking. Now I'm glad that we met."

The friendship has led to success at the Minnesota High



Submitted photo

Erik Panyan, left, and Forest Lake native Charlie Weiss pose with the 42-inch muskie that helped the pair win the Minnesota High School Muskie Tournament for the second year in a row.

School Muskie Tournament, which for the past two years has been held in mid-August at Lake Vermilion. Last year Weiss, who will be a junior at North Lakes Academy, and Panyan, soon to be a freshman at Virginia High School, won the tournament.

This year the pair repeated as champions of the tournament, which is sponsored by the Twin Cities Chapter of Muskies, Inc.

What is most surprising about

the back-to-back titles is that Weiss admits he was not interested in fishing for muskie early in his life.

"I wasn't excited about it at first, because it was hard to reel in a 40-inch muskie when you're little," Weiss said. "But over the years, I've come to enjoy it. I love the thrill of reeling in the fish. It's exciting, especially when you get that giant monster into the boat. It's a thrill to catch these magnif-

icent creatures."

Last year Weiss caught and released the winning fish, which measured at 49.5 inches.

"Last year's tournament was a little different, because of COVID-19," Weiss said. "But we were happy when I caught the fish – it was pretty exciting."

This year Panyan caught and released the winner, which measured 42 inches, despite having a bumpy start to the tournament.

"We forgot to put the drain plug in," Panyan said. "So the boat took on a little water, but we got the bilge pump going. I had a big fish up to the boat once – a 45-pound fish, we thought – but it fell off my hook."

"Eventually I got a 42-pounder, and we kept watching the app to see if anyone got a bigger fish. A 42 is a good fish, but you can beat it. So we were pumped when the deadline came and no one had a bigger fish."

While the back-to-back titles are nice, the best part of fishing for both Weiss and Panyan is the opportunity to spend time together.

"We joke around, talk about life and lots of different things," Weiss said. "It's fun when you get to share the time with someone you've known for a long time."

Panyan agreed, adding: "Charlie is a joker who likes to make a lot of puns, and he's a lot of fun. For example, after we caught the muskie a year ago our hands were slimy, and Charlie kept asking me if I wanted a 'fish slime sandwich.'"

"I declined the offer."

Ranger girls swimmers achieve early goals in win at C-I



Photo by John Wagner

Sophomore Bella Pope, second from the left, and the Forest Lake girls swim team got off to a great start to the season by defeating Cambridge-Isanti 104-74 on Monday, Aug. 30.

Forest Lake sweeps every event in 104-74 victory

John Wagner
Sports Editor

New coach Rochelle McKenzie did not set high goals for the Forest Lake girls swim team in its season-opening dual meet at Cambridge-Isanti on Monday, Aug. 30.

"I wanted to make sure everybody showed up to their events on time, and we all got in the pool

when we were supposed to," she said with a laugh.

McKenzie was kidding, of course. But she certainly was pleased that her Rangers did much more than just show up in a 104-74 thrashing of the Bluejackets in their home pool.

"We just wanted to see where everyone was at – and we were pleasantly surprised in a lot of the races," she said. "[When we set the lineup] we went based on what we have seen this season."

"Some of the girls were in events that sur-

prised them. But we didn't have any preconceived notions; we just went off what they had done in practice, and in some events that worked out really well."

The Rangers burst out of the gates to a big early lead thanks to a 1-2 finish in the 200 medley relay – the quartet of sophomore Grace Chatwin, freshman Grace True, sophomore Bella Pope and junior Haley Bent won with a time of 2:03.33 – and a 1-2-3 finish in the 200 free led by True's winning time of 2:11.38.

And those victories set the tone for the entire meet as Forest Lake won every event until it had secured the victory and started swimming strictly exhibition races.

Chatwin and junior Izzy Maloney went 1-3 in the 200 IM, with Chatwin winning with a 2:32.97 clocking, and Pope and Bent combined to go 1-2 in the 50 free, with Pope's time of 27.89 winning that event.

Sophomores Delaney Nickles and Brooke Dubuque went 1-2 in diving, with Nickles winning with a 237.85 score, and Pope and Bent took 1-2 in the 100 fly, with Pope winning with a 1:05.14 clocking.

Maloney and fellow junior Sophia Niznik went 1-2 in the 100 free, with Maloney's time of 1:03.08 good for first, while freshman Avery Fallon led a 1-3-4 finish in the 500 free with her winning 6:14.86 clocking.

When Forest Lake's 200 free relay of Chatwin, Pope, Bent and True won that event with a time of 1:49.56, the Rangers swam strictly exhibition events the rest of the way.

Chatwin would have won the 100 back with a time of 1:08.05 had she not swam exhibition, and True would have won the 100 breast with a time of 1:15.37 had she not swam exhibition. And Forest Lake's 400 free relay of juniors Ally LaBelle and Leah Henderson, sophomore Alex Ready and Niznik were the first to touch the wall with a time of 4:25.42 that also was an exhibition.

"There were some faster-than-expected surpris-

es, and there were some girls who did really well in some events," McKenzie said of the meet. "Grace True's time in the 100 breaststroke was just amazing, and Avery Fallon I nearly put in the 100 free because she's a good 100 swimmer, but her 500 time was really strong. It's going to be hard to take her out of that event."

The Rangers will return to action with a meet at Roseville on Thursday, Sept. 2.

Football opens Thursday



Photo by John Wagner

The Forest Lake football team competed in a four-school scrimmage at White Bear Lake on Saturday, Aug. 28 in preparation for its season-opening contest at St. Michael-Albertville on Thursday, Sept. 2. Kickoff against the Knights is set for 7 p.m.

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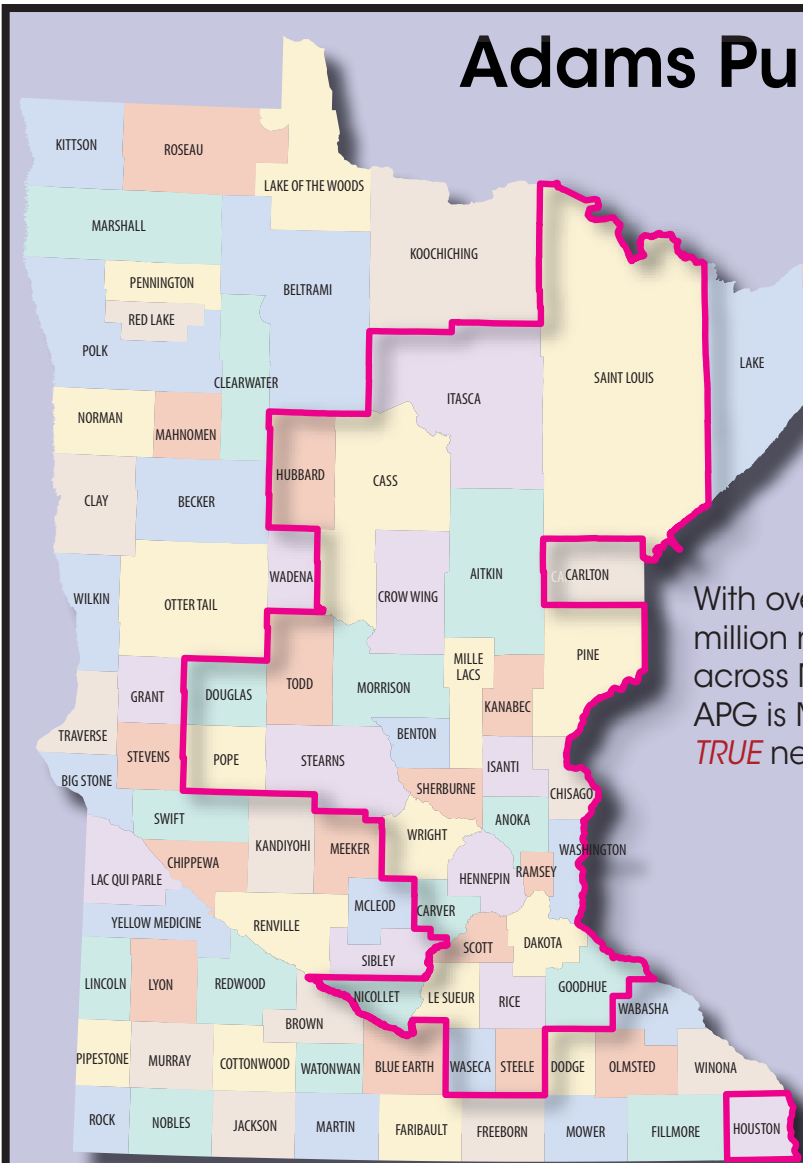
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