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Forest Lake aims to revitalize downtown

Community feedback session scheduled for Jan. 25

Hannah Davis
News Editor

Struggling downtowns are par for the course these days. The once economic core to cities across America have been struggling to find footing for downtown shopping and entertainment amidst a quickly changing society.

"It's not a unique Forest Lake problem," City Administrator Patrick Casey said. He said that in Forest Lake, a prime example is retail moving out toward the interstate with big box stores, he said. "Small downtown stores just can't compete. Mom and pop stores retire and don't want to do business there any longer. Then you throw in there online shopping."

But the city of Forest Lake is making plans to hopefully revitalize the downtown experience and attract businesses and life back to the center of the city.

"It's trying to find the right businesses, restaurants, whatever



Photo by Hannah Davis

The city of Forest Lake created a downtown planning committee, in coordination with its economic development agency, to create a downtown vision with hopes of revitalizing the city's historic core.

the case may be, for downtown to compete and be successful in an area. That's the challenge, and you have to have businesses and restaurants and other activities that draw people there," Casey said.

After years of what Forest Lake Mayor Mara Bain has recognized as a lack of vision and implementation, the city has taken steps to begin the planning and

redevelopment of the Broadway Avenue and Lake Street corridor. Creating a downtown vision has been a long time coming, according to Bain.

"It's been a project that's been talked about for years in Forest Lake, even if you go back as far as the redesign of Lakeside Memorial Park and building projects even 20 years ago," she said. "It's been a longtime discussion."

Bain said that as she transitioned into the mayor's seat, what she found were outdated plans for downtown redevelopment, or perhaps projects that never got off the ground. She said there had been discussions over the years with individual property owners, but no up-to-date downtown vision plan.

In 2018, the Houle family

Downtown planning see page 3

School district approves five-day quarantine

Natalie Ryder
Community Editor

The Forest Lake Area School District approved a transition from a 10-day quarantine period to a five-day quarantine period following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health.

"If we can shorten the 10-day quarantine, which is rather extensive, to a five-day, then we get kids back into classrooms sooner and people back to work sooner," Superintendent Steve Massey said.

The school district was waiting for MDH to adhere to the CDC's new guidelines regarding shortened quarantine periods.

"We were waiting for MDH to concur with the CDC before we made our adjustment," Massey said, noting a trust in the CDC's research about the new omicron variant, its infection rates and how long an appropriate quarantine is.

Students or faculty who test positive with coronavirus or are in close contact with someone who tested positive may return to school on the sixth day after exposure if they are asymptomatic after a full five days of quarantine.

Returning students or faculty will be required to mask for the next consecutive five days upon returning to the schools.

Massey urged that testing and monitoring symptoms is vital to the district's operations in order to mitigate the spread in schools with this new five-day protocol.

"We want people testing. If they're feeling symptomatic, or if they feel that they've been in contact with somebody who has COVID, we want them testing," Massey said.

The CDC and MDH recommend that indi-

School district see page 2

Inaugural international snow sculpting contest hits Stillwater

Matt Debow
Stillwater Gazette

After this week, Lowell Park will be adorned with 10 large snow sculptures created by teams from around the world.

Ten snow-carving teams from five countries, including Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Turkey and the United States will have created the sculptures as part of the inaugural World Snow Sculpting Championship held from Jan. 18-23, hosted by the Greater Stillwater Chamber of Commerce and the city of Stillwater.

"For years, Minnesota has taken the title of the bold north because of our community, perseverance, and affinity for the outdoors in the coldest months of the year," chamber Executive Director Robin Anthony said in a press release. "We're thrilled to be bringing the inaugural event to Minnesota and our Stillwater community. With our partnerships, we're building the foundation for an amazing annual world snow sculpting championship for everyone to celebrate and enjoy."

Spectators can watch the sculpting teams create works of art out of huge, man-made blocks of snow created with the help of Afton Alps and Green Acres.

The chamber will host several events in conjunction with the competition including an opening ceremony at JX Event Center on Wednesday evening, Jan. 19; a chamber mixer on Thursday evening, Jan. 20, to celebrate the chamber's 130th birthday, and will also host the "World's Coolest Block Party" following the competition on Saturday night, Jan. 22.

Once the competition begins at 9 a.m. on Jan. 18, teams can carve until 3 a.m. the next morning, and can pick up their work again at 6 a.m.

The reason why teams are allowed to work late into the night is because the colder temperatures aids in carving, Anthony explained to the Gazette in a phone interview on Jan. 12.

"They can get really meticulous with it," Anthony said.

Event idea spark

The World Snow Sculpting Championship came about with the chamber expanding on a "Wintertime in Stillwater" campaign designed to draw more people to downtown in colder months.

The campaign started in late 2020. When businesses were shut down — or severely limited on their operations while the pandemic was raging — a

Snow sculpting see page 2



Photo by Matt Debow

Minnesota native Jon Baller works on a snow sculpture of a lumberjack in Lowell Park on Tuesday, Jan. 18.

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