



Hutchinson man faces charges for crash in Renville County. **A3.**

Stage set for Super Bowl LVI. **B1.**

WILLMAR, MINN.

MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2022

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For more photos from Spicer Winterfest, visit wctrib.com.

Photos by Mike Moore / West Central Tribune

Children run up to the front of the ice castle at Spicer Winterfest on Saturday just before fireworks were set off along Green Lake in Spicer.

Session kicks off with many questions

Budget surplus, hero paychecks, COVID response top items for 2022 Legislature

By Dana Ferguson
West Central Tribune

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota Legislature will kick off the 2022 legislative session Monday, Jan. 31, and many questions hang in the balance as legislators take up their work.

Lawmakers will again navigate the best ways to help Minnesotans manage the pandemic, weigh more than \$5.5 billion local projects around the state and consider a swath of state law changes.

And they'll likely spend months debating the best use of a \$7.75 billion budget surplus.

Their decisions could result in tax relief for Minnesotans, new COVID-19 restrictions, rewrites of the state's minimum criminal sentences, more child care slots open to young children and more.

Before legislators return to St. Paul, here's a quick rundown of what you need to know.

Still a divided government

The Legislature remains divided with Democrats controlling the House of Representatives and the governor's office. Republicans hold a lead in the Senate.

That means that overly partisan policies or spending priorities will likely fall away this year; the items where both sides can agree will advance.

But that doesn't mean lawmakers will set aside things they care most about or that they hope to tout on the campaign trail.

Legislators seeking another term in their positions or vying for higher office will push policies that can help boost their reputation with their base or try to tear down that of an opponent. And that will likely be clear in the Senate, where a pair of GOP gubernatorial hopefuls aim to illustrate why the state should elect them rather than returning Gov. Tim Walz to the office for a second term.

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ICE CAN BE NICE

Polar Plunge raises more than \$59K at Spicer Winterfest

By Mike Moore
West Central Tribune

Spicer once again proved it does winter fun better than the rest on Saturday, as its 31st annual Winterfest brought out hundreds of folks to soak up the season and take part in the Family Fun Day along Green Lake's Saulsbury Beach.

The day kicked off with the Frozen 5k run and walk, before the Polar Plunge took center stage at noon. This year served as the 17th annual plunge, which benefits Special Olympics Minnesota. Midway through the event, 244 participants were known to have signed up to take the plunge into the frigid waters of Green Lake, raising \$59,539.

The afternoon featured hockey activities, kick sledding, downhill sledding, hayrides and bonfires on the beach before fireworks and the Fire on Ice dance to the Dam Jammers closed out the evening of fun.

According to a news release from the Willmar Police Department, the temperature at plunge time was about 23 degrees with a 7 mph wind, making the wind chill 14 degrees. There was approximately 21 inches of ice on Green Lake.



Nash Danielson, 3, of Hector, slides down the Spicer Winterfest sled hill Saturday.

'It changed the way she used'

Minn. health officials help users test illicit drugs for fentanyl

By Paul John Scott
West Central Tribune

ROCHESTER — They call it overdose, but the correct term for accidental fentanyl ingestion might be closer to poisoning.

A powerful narcotic 80 to 100 times stronger than morphine, the synthetic opioid was originally developed for the treatment of cancer via transdermal patch. Illicit suppliers have adulterated a variety of street drugs with fentanyl, however, and it has driven an unprecedented explosion in opioid deaths.

The Drug Enforcement Agency reporting says fentanyl is being added to cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin,

and counterfeit opioids. The narcotic is laced into illicit drugs because it is cheap, potent and plentiful, but at unknown doses, thereby increasing its lethal potential.

According to Minnesota state health officials, opioid-involved deaths in Minnesota jumped from 412 to 654 between 2019 and 2020, with synthetic opioids responsible for 82% of that total. While the greatest number of fentanyl poisonings have occurred in the Twin Cities, no part of the state has been spared.

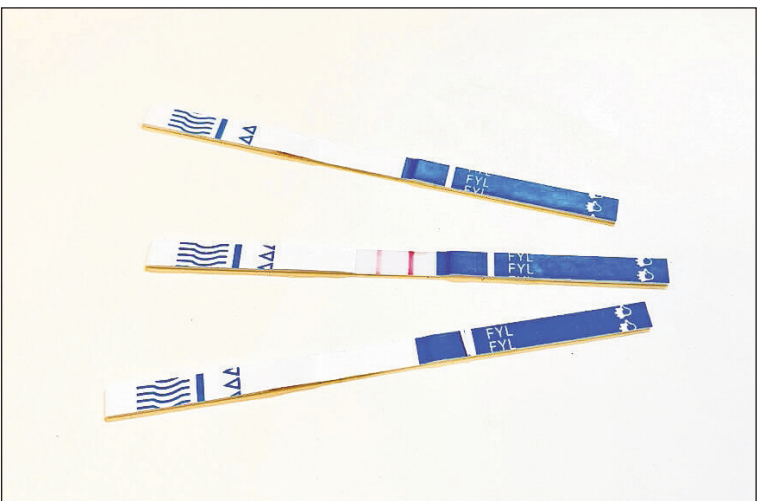
In Olmsted County, for example, there were 16 deaths from overdose in 2020, with the number of nonfatal overdoses in Olmsted emergency

rooms having more than doubled from 21 to 48. During this same period, opioid prescriptions continued a five-year decline, decreasing almost 10%.

In the past, the notion of helping drug users test their substance for adulterants would have been rejected as enabling. Now it is at the forefront of public health.

Since July 2021, it has been not only legal within Minnesota to distribute strips for testing the safety of illicit drugs, the distribution of fentanyl test strips has benefited from a coordinated effort within the Minnesota Department of Health to save lives.

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Contributed / Steve Rummler Hope Network

Fentanyl test strips are now available free of charge for people concerned they might be taking a drug that is adulterated with the deadly narcotic.