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WAPS Board pans 'Redefining Ready' - **4B**

Final game for WSU's Coach Pooch - **6B**

Will Winona grow? Projections differ - **8B**

Citizens react to Winona's ERC-police-fire plans

by CESAR SALAZAR and CHRIS ROGERS

While the Winona City Council took a tentative step forward this week on the proposed police-fire-community center project at the East Recreation Center (ERC), users of the ERC and the city's Friendship Center expressed some concerns about the lack of green space in the plan, among other issues.

Since 2018, the city has been planning an addition and renovation for the ERC to cre-

ate a new community center, which would provide a new location for the city's senior center, known as the Friendship Center. Last summer, city officials began studying a possible new police-fire station to address long-standing space and safety issues at Central Fire Station and the Winona Police Department's current headquarters. In February, city staff and consultants presented a proposal to demolish the ERC and create a fire-police station there — a plan which upended designs for the community center at the ERC. Earlier this month, offi-

cials presented a plan to buy the neighboring St. Stan's school and convert it into a community center, with a new police-fire station occupying the ERC block.

On Monday, city staff presented cost estimates for building a new police station, fire station, and community center as three separate, standalone projects: \$12-13 million for a community center (up from a \$7 million estimate last year) at the ERC, \$16-19 million for a new fire station at the Central Fire Station site, and \$16-19 million for a new police station at an undetermined

location. The total cost of three separate projects — \$47-55 million — would be \$9-12 million more than the cost estimate for the combined police-fire-community center project at the ERC and St. Stan's sites, according to city staff. City Manager Chad Ubl also said a combined facility would have a better chance at garnering state funding.

The Winona City Council unanimously

see **ERC** page 4a

MMAM's Seasonal Saturday draws crowd



by ALEXANDRA RETTER

The painting of the North Sea was a reminder of her home in Germany for Ulrike Schorn-Hoffert. While at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum's (MMAM) Seasonal Saturday program earlier this month, she saw the painting, which is part of the museum's "German Expression and the Sea" exhibit. "I've always wanted to see that since it's been on display, to see that connection with

my home," she said of the exhibit.

The goal of the Seasonal Saturday program is to help people access the arts, Retail and Communications Manager Caitlin Crouchet said. Admission is only \$1, and the museum offers a variety of activities, from live music to a search and find game. "There's all these different entry points and [appeals] to

see **SEASONAL** page 5a

Photo by Alexandra Retter

Joanne Steele examines a piece of art in a paper cutting exhibit at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum during the museum's Seasonal Saturday program in May.

What prompted School Board to dissolve DEC?

By CHRIS ROGERS and ALEXANDRA RETTER

Last fall, the Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board dissolved the district's long-standing Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC) and created a new committee with different members, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Over several weeks, the School Board held discussions on making changes to DEC they said would empower DEC, but it wasn't until the final vote that it was clear the board was disbanding the existing committee. Even then, some DEC members were confused themselves about the committee's status after receiving a message from school officials about the decision.

Last winter and this spring, the Winona Post used Minnesota Data Practices Act requests to obtain emails from School Board members and top administrators leading up to last fall's decision. Those emails, along with interviews, show that concerns over DEC's final meetings in spring 2021 prompted School Board members Nancy Denzer and Karl Sonneman and Superintendent Annette Freiheit to discuss the committee's future several times over the summer.

see **DEC** page 8a

Lawmakers compromise on school funding

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

How could the state spend a surplus of over \$9 billion? This week, state lawmakers and the governor agreed to an outline for an agreement on spending that includes \$4 billion in tax cuts, \$4 billion of funding in areas such as education and social services and \$4 billion in reserve, according to the Minnesota House's Session Daily. Prior to the agreement, the House and Senate debated separate education funding bills, with the House bill calling for billions of education funding in numerous areas and the Senate bill focusing on literacy.

Of the \$4 billion of funding, \$1 billion would go to education, \$1 billion to health care and human services and \$450 million to public safety.

"I'm pleased with it. I think this went beyond where we thought we would be at the end of the session. That's good news," Rep. Gene Pelowski (DFL-Winona) said. He said that due to differences between the House

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Fresh start for Treatment Court grads



Photo by Cesar Salazar

Sarah Rose Davis graduates from the Winona County Treatment Court during a commencement at the county court on May 12. Davis graduated from treatment court alongside Jeremy Lee Bobo as a way to better themselves and reintegrate with the community.

by CESAR SALAZAR

The Treatment Court of Winona County (TCWC) has helped dozens of Winonans rehabilitate into the community since its inception in 2012. The TCWC serves as an alternative to jail time for drug offenders by guiding non-violent offenders with comprehensive case plans. The comprehensive plan includes weekly drug court hearings, submission

to 12 random drug tests a month, meeting with a drug court team member twice a week, and working a minimum of 40 hours per month on the case plan.

The TCWC graduated two participants, Jeremy Lee Bobo and Sarah Rose Davis, this past Thursday. Third Judicial District Judge Nancy Buytendorp presided over the Treatment Court. She spoke highly of Bobo's and Davis' journey, saying, "Both Sarah and Jeremy have

made these changes, and they both have so much potential. Recovery doesn't happen overnight. It's a lot of work, and it's a lifetime project."

Buytendorp stated that May is National Drug Court Month and said that it was "very fitting Sarah and Jeremy are graduating this month."

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guest column

by Chad Dull, vice president of student success, MSC SE

May: 'It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year'

If you were on campus at Minnesota State College Southeast recently, you might have heard me humming or singing and been a little confused. "Why is Chad singing an Andy Williams Christmas song?" you might have thought as I hummed over and over again, "It's the most wonderful time of the year ..."

I've been working in post-secondary education for two decades now, and as wonderful as the winter holidays are, to me they just don't compare to graduation season. May is truly my favorite time of the year and maybe I can help explain why.

I remember my own college graduation. My path through college was neither direct nor quick, but May of 2000 marked a turning point. When I finally graduated from college, it was the day I could think about my career and my future differently. I have never forgotten that feeling.

So, as I sit on stage this year and watch our MSC Southeast graduates gather to cross the stage on graduation day, I will remind myself they are each completing an important chapter of their life story as well.

I will think of the gentleman I met in his 30s or 40s who told me that our food pantry was what kept weight on his body as he chased his dream of a professional job in the trades.

I will think of scholarship winners in our Phi Theta Kappa chap-

ter who have the university as their next destination, some of them the first in their family to go to college and earn a degree.

I will think of the brilliant musicians who took the time to add repairing and building instruments to their already remarkable skill set.

So, when I see a nurse, or a welder, or a cosmetologist walk across that stage at commencement, I don't just see the person, I see their dream.

My career has been in the technical and community college sector and that has been on purpose. I have told people for 20 years that I get the unique privilege of watching lives change in real time. If I am honest, it is a little selfish on my part, because I am lucky enough to work in a place these things happen every day. That's why I try to go to every special event that our students and faculty create to let us share in the achievement of their dreams.

So, I give my thanks to our amazing students and to the wonderful faculty and staff who partnered with them in the good times and the challenging times. This week has been thrilling with the Student Guitar Show and Violin Showcase in Red Wing and the Practical Nursing Pinning Ceremony and Commencement Ceremony in Winona. May is truly the most wonderful time of the year — and I will never grow tired of it.



letters

Nitrate levels merit sensible limits on ag

From: Karen Ahrens
Lewiston

An informative and thought provoking We Are Water collaborative effort was hosted by the Winona County Historical Society recently.

My husband, son, daughter-in-law, and I attended the event as we are particularly concerned about water — a precious commodity and shared resource. Although it was described as a self-guided tour, we conversed with several representatives from the participating agencies. The exhibit was interactive, seeking both our personal and collective relationship with water.

A nitrate testing clinic was also provided by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture program called Tap-In Safe Drinking Water for Southeast Minnesota.

We took a sample of our Utica Township private well for testing. When it was last tested in 2019, our well tested at 13.33ppm for nitrates, which was already quite high and over the limit for safe consumption. Now in 2022, our well sample tested at an alarming 19.00ppm for nitrates, nearly double the "safe" drinking limit.

Our own well exemplifies the broader issue of nitrate contamination and the extreme vulnerability of water supplies, particularly in Utica Township. It serves to renew our commitment to speak with our neighbors and local leaders about addressing these issues.

These results are also evidence for the continued need of sensible limitations on the concentration of animal feedlots in Winona County.

Remembering officers killed in line of duty

From: Patty Spitzer
Winona

Today my attention is garnered by law enforcement leaders in Washington, D.C., giving a roll call of the hundreds of names of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty this past year. Hundreds of families (the killed officers' children, parents, grandparents, and grandchildren), gathered at this memorial, being held up by leaders and supporters of law enforcement. These family members lost their loved ones as they served and protected all communities in America. These murdered officers' are someone's child, a father, a mother.

Our law enforcement officers deserve our respect. Officers' do not deserve to be assaulted, maimed and certainly not killed.

Thank you Minnesota State Patrol, Winona County Sheriff's Office and the Winona Police Department. Your service is appreciated by those who are not interested in evil.

letters

An open letter to Father Burns

From: Elizabeth Kinsella, SMU '93

Dear Father Burns, 29 years ago, I graduated from Saint Mary's University. During my four years, I served as a student senator, class president and Student Senate president. Following graduation, I served on the Saint Mary's University Alumni Board. A steadfast supporter, financially and otherwise, you might say I was "all in" when it came to Saint Mary's University. As of today — count me out.

Undoubtedly, you have a challenging

job, and, to a certain extent, you need to run a university like a business. If you are intent on running Saint Mary's University strictly as a corporation, I humbly offer some observations.

Your marketing executives should have cautioned you that your new curriculum seems uninspired. Your accounting department should have advised you that you risk losing financial support of alumni rooted in the majors being slashed. Your PR professionals should have better prepared you for (what will be) epic damage control. Your real estate advisors should have alerted you that the soon-to-be-empty Page Theater was a hallmark of the campus. Paramount to everything, your board of directors should have unreservedly

questioned your leadership.

Perhaps most insulting about your letter, is your feeble attempt to tie-in Lasallian values, Character and Virtue (both capitalized for good measure). Your predecessors must be apoplectic. Stripping the university of any character seems to be your modus operandi. I might add, if you had a modicum of character, you'd supply your own email address at the bottom of your letter, rather than direct them to a team of people who are likely just as upset as I am.

The closing of your letter asked us to pray for you. Be assured, I will because your business is in trouble, Father Burns.

PS: If this letter stings a bit, please go ahead and thank one of your English professors (while he or she still has a job).

ERC

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agreed to continue exploring the community center's options with consulting firms BKV and ISG, begin discussions with St. Stanislaus Parish to buy the school property, and establish a plan to gather public input.

Green space a common concern

The city's latest proposal would eliminate the existing basketball courts, playground, and community garden at the ERC — which currently occupy three-quarters of the ERC block. The proposed community center would provide a new, larger indoor facility occupying roughly half of the St. Stan's block, but there would be very limited green space outside the building.

Amy Welker has been bringing her grandchildren to the ERC for the past eight years and had various concerns about the project. One concern was related to the outdoor space available. She said that indoor use of the ERC was not possible during the pandemic, so many of the ERC users had to use its available outdoor options. "Even when it's closed, the kids are here playing. It's kind of important to have an outside area," she said.

Tara Bailey and her husband, Andre, lead a drumline that's based out of the ERC. Tara believes that a joint safety building would infringe not only the ERC where the community can gather but also the residential area surrounding the ERC. "I think the city has lost its mind if it wants to put cops on top of children," she said. She continued that the proposed joint safety building would also remove some of the available outdoor play space, something that is already an issue for the East End.

At a recent meeting with City Council members, the Winona Friendship Center's Activity Council members expressed concerns over the smaller outdoor green space under the new proposal. Winona City Manager Chad Ubl said the city is looking into whether it could secure more room for green space at the St. Stan's site or invest more money into other green spaces around the ERC neighborhood to make up for the lack of it at the new community center.

"The inside — it's great that they want to make it newer and nicer and kind of be convincing with that, but it's good for kids to get outside and have that space outside," said Kassie DeVorak, a Winona resident who frequented the ERC as a child and now lives next door. "That's the whole thing. People are saying, get your kids outside. Now it's like we're going to take it away and you can play inside." She continued, "I think a lot of kids, especially around the East End, they're low-income families and their parents work and it's hard to get over to the Y or the aquatic center or places like that, where this is right in their backyard." She continued, "I don't know what the kids around here would do. I think it would lead to more crime and younger kids not really knowing what to do with themselves. There's not a lot available for kids to do."

Will new facility have enough indoor space?

Currently, the Friendship Center and the ERC have a combined estimated 24,000 square feet, and the proposed new community center at St. Stan's would have 2,000 more square feet, according to city staff.

The Friendship Center has been asking for a bigger space for over a decade. Currently, the Masonic Temple has issues with program schedules due to not having enough space for all the groups, according to former Director Malia Fox.

The Friendship Center Activity Council President Bernadette Thicke suggested building upward on either the current or future St. Stan's property to help ensure that both recreational centers have room for growth, and to save money. Mayor Scott Sherman and Ubl said that the current St. Stan's school building is unable to be modified for a second-floor expansion due to building safety concerns.

Tara Bailey also said that the drumline doesn't have enough space at the ERC for practice, something that's also an issue for other programs trying to establish themselves at the ERC. She believes that moving the ERC into the St. Stan's property wouldn't necessarily help to alleviate those problems. "It's already going to be an adjustment with the Friendship Center," she said. "Now they're trying to cram everything into one building." She also said that parking space would become an issue for the community center, as the ERC would be competing for parking spaces with the joint safety building and the Friendship Center. "This needs to stay a community center," she said.

Tara said she would like to see more rooms, electronics, and an operable kitchen for the ERC at the very least. "They definitely need to update the building and not just not do anything," she said.

Concerns over police station

A few community members expressed concerns about placing a police station next to the ERC or community center.

"I don't really want to live next door to the cop office," DeVorak said, saying a police station would be an "eyesore." She added, "It just doesn't seem like a good combination."

"If cops and kids are such a good idea, why are they taking them out of the schools?" Tara Bailey asked, referring to Winona Area Public Schools' decision to eliminate a School Resource Officer following a Department of Human Rights investigation

into alleged racial discrimination against students. "It's an intimidation thing."

Some parents might have old criminal charges, Tara Bailey noted. "They have to walk through a sea of cops just to take their kids here. Do you think that's going to make them feel comfortable or welcome to come here?" she asked.

During Monday's City Council meeting, council member Eileen Moeller also said she was concerned about placing a police station in a residential neighborhood next to a youth recreation center. Picking up on concerns police officials had shared about how, at the current station, sex offenders may be updating paperwork in the same lobby that harassment victims are waiting to make a report, Moeller said, "I'm really uncomfortable with all of that happening right where there are children playing. I'm really not convinced that's the best option."

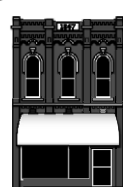
City Council comments

"We need to have those questions answered so that we can have a clear path forward," City Council Member Michelle Alexander said in regard to whether the city could purchase St. Stan's school.

"I think we obviously need more information, and I'm especially keen to hear more from the public now that we have a lot more information out to the public about costs and things like that," Moeller said. "It's very clear to me that all three of these pieces of our city need new facilities. All our facilities are currently insufficient or in some cases unsafe. I really don't have a problem with putting the fire department in a proposed block near the rec center. I'd prefer not to tear down the rec center and take away all the outdoor space, I really don't like that."

"I see three things I understand; our staff made an excellent presentation that we need some updates to our facility," City Council Member Steve Young said. "That's crystal clear. We've got numerous facilities that are out of date and hit their life expectancy and need to be replaced. I think we settled on a location, it's clear that that location is especially the place to be for fire and I think it makes sense to locate the other facilities there as well. Finally, costs. Certainly costs will continue to come into focus but there's at least some initial convincing numbers that would indicate the costs align as well. I think it's especially true that we will attract more state bonding dollars sharing components with this when we build these facilities together."

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