

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Let’s learn something from latest COVID death

Last week, COVID-19 claimed its youngest victim in Douglas County since the pandemic began nearly two years ago. The victim was between the ages of 30-34, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Health. (Except for the age range, health officials don’t release any other information about the victims, citing medical privacy.) No one can begin to imagine what that 30-34-year-old’s family is going through, facing the giant hole that loss will leave. A life was cut way too short, not even half-lived, but gone because of a deadly virus that some people believe doesn’t even exist. Let’s learn something from that unnamed person’s death. Let’s take this virus more seriously than ever. It is, after all, not over yet. It’s still out there, circulating in our community, mutating, looking for more lives to take. The numbers, though as cold and flat as a gravestone, show just how strong COVID’s grip continues to be in our area. As of Nov. 11, the cumulative number of COVID-19 cases in Douglas County totaled 7,079 – up 301 cases from a week ago, and up 957 cases from a month ago. A total of 98 people in the county have died from COVID. That’s up 10 from a month ago. Cases have also climbed in nearby counties. Here are their numbers now compared to last month: Grant – 888, up 128; Otter Tail – 9,007, up 1,252; Pope – 1,858, up 335; Stearns – 30,823, up 3,009; Stevens – 1,473, up 274; and Todd – 4,515, up 673. The combined death total of Douglas and those six other counties now stands at 544. Active COVID cases in Douglas County remain stubbornly high. Since the start of the month, active cases have ranged from 225 to 272, according to data

from Horizon Public Health. Douglas County’s vaccination rates are inching up, but there is still room for improvement. As of Nov. 9, the percentage of people aged 5 and older who have received at least one vaccine dose was 58.9% – 8.5% below the statewide average of 67.4%. There are also chilling trends happening statewide. State health officials reported another Minnesota school staff COVID-19 death in a weekly update issued Thursday, Nov. 11, bringing the number of staff deaths since the first week of September to eight. One student has died from COVID-19 complications since the beginning of the school year. Across the state, 16 staff and two students have died from COVID-19 cases associated with pre-K through 12th grade schools since the beginning of the pandemic. The figures include public, private and tribal schools. In a statement, teachers union Education Minnesota described the deaths as tragic and called for the state health department to release anonymous summary data on deaths and hospitalizations tied to schools to help educators make better safety decisions. But this isn’t all doom and gloom. There’s some light ahead and a way to fight this thing before it claims more lives. Together, we can greatly reduce this stubborn fourth wave of the virus. Get vaccinated. Get a booster shot, if you qualify. If you’re experiencing any symptoms – such as a fever, trouble breathing, fatigue, loss of smell or taste – get tested. If you’re told to quarantine, quarantine. Don’t spread misinformation. Don’t take COVID lightly. Remember the 30-34 year old and all the other lives that have been lost. They’re not just figures on a stat sheet.

Help is here for homeless, hungry

In October 2020 I devoted this article to Age Friendly Alexandria. Since the terminology was new to most of us, I gave a lot of space to the history of this title and how it was awarded as an honor from WHO and AARP to our city. Now the title of Age Friendly is used by many organizations and efforts to make areas friendly to people of all ages is a common program. When we received that title back in 2014, Alexandria was the 75th City in the nation and one of two in Minnesota to be so honored. We were definitely the only one in a rural area. It all started locally with a donation to the Alexandria Senior Center to help it find out the needs of the elderly population. From the results of a survey done throughout the 56308-area code a local group of service providers was created. It was headed up by Dian Lopez, who still serves in that leadership role. A qualification for the honor was to continue to work on improving life in this area and this first group mainly targeted the elderly population. Currently the state is seeking that distinction. Proudly, Lopez serves on that board representing the rural areas while helping us become Age Friendly Minnesota. AARP also has a program nationwide to develop Age Friendly Communities. The Area Agency on Aging for nine counties also has an active program called Age Friendly Communities. Areas defined as the “Eight Domains of Livability” for all ages are: outdoor spaces and public places, housing, respect and social inclusion, communications and information, transportation, social participation, work and civic engagement,



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In the Know

community and health services. Alexandria has done very well in these areas and for several years has been designated the best place in Minnesota to retire to. A few years ago, the Alexandria group had to develop a three-year plan of emphasis for improvement. They selected health care and transportation. Representatives of local nonprofit groups and governmental agencies worked together to improve the delivery and availability of services in these areas. Then the requirement to continue in the Age Friendly status was the creation of a five-year plan. Immediately the addition of mental health care was identified as a separate part of health care. Efforts continued. The group hasn’t said the eight domains have all been met but generally it is agreed that almost all needed services are available in our area. We just have to make people aware of them. That’s more difficult than it sounds. So, Dian Lopez strengthened the local endeavors by having a new eight-member board elected. It’s committed to having a new name! They are working to develop one at this time. To many in the rural areas, Age Friendly Alexandria indicates that services are available only to those in Alexandria so they don’t participate even in simple programs such as food drops. This is a concern because most of the services of nonprofits and government agencies service the entire county and many serve a Region of other rural counties. Another goal is to promote services by the type of service needed rather than promoting a listing of agencies. This would enable one to locate all services that offer

home repairs, in-home health care, all forms of transportation available, mental health programs by type of need etc. Douglas County has just appointed a new coordinator of senior services, Darina Dykema, who works in the area of the Veterans Office and the library. Most of the other counties have similar positions. As the goal of Age Friendly Communities spreads, grants have also become available to help with issues such as day care, wellness programs, diversity issues. In our rural area no one should go hungry or be without help in remaining in their homes. The services are there! We have to be aggressive in letting our residents learn about what is here! We are fortunate in that area as well. We have area-wide media that’s also committed to making the quality of life outstanding in their areas of communication. They do it without the political bias of the major metro networks. Be it via radio or newspaper/printed flyers, they help us work together! Many residents of all ages are dependent on our local media for the news and communication. They’re not computer literate or do not have access to it. We need to work closely together. I am so proud to have been a part of this Age Friendly network for eight years. I am committed to helping everyone of any age become aware of special needs and the help available. And I am especially proud of living in an area that unlike the rest of our country has its emphasis on working together. Age Friendly doesn’t care what your political party is. It just cares about YOU! Kathryn LeBrasseur is a former executive director of the Alexandria Senior Center and has been involved in a variety of community organizations, many focusing on senior issues. “In the Know” is a rotating column written by community leaders from the Douglas County area.

LETTER

Critical Race Theory is a phony issue

To the editor: Critical Race Theory (CRT) is defined as “a complex examination of Constitutional Law, the evolution of legislation and law memorializing racial practices into Constitutional Law; therefore, institutionalizing the practices with protection.” Clearly, Critical Race Theory is not applicable to students at the K-12 level. The President of the American Federation of Teachers has publicly stated that Critical Race Theory is NOT taught in elementary or middle or high schools. CRT is taught only in law schools and some colleges. Teachers and school boards are under assault by political factions in America that falsely label any teaching of race, racism and discrimination in the classroom as CRT. Politicians and billionaires should not decide a school’s curriculum. That is up to teachers, school boards and school administrators. The public must be better at separating fact from fiction on the news and social media. When voting, we must elect individuals with the right qualifications and experience to oversee our schools. It is wrong to threaten and bully teachers for teaching students the honest unbiased history of this country and the world. Among the many important issues teachers and school boards face today, Critical Race Theory is NOT on the list because it is nonexistent. Jan Duhnke Alexandria, MN

Reader Advisory Board helps improve newspaper In its ongoing effort to improve the newspaper, the Echo Press has a Reader Advisory Board that meets every other month to offer feedback, story ideas and suggestions. Readers can also offer advisory board members their comments. Current members include Louie Seesz, Mary Anderson, Jim Nelson, Jane McCrery, Mark Hintermeyer, Judy Backhaus, Joel Novak and Mike Dempsey.

2011: Slick roads lead to a fiery crash

This Week in 1971 – 50 years ago: Highway department crews are installing a new warning light at the intersection of Highway 29 South and Interstate 94. The light is a “temporary” measure until more permanent design changes are made in the intersection. The light will warn drivers heading south on 29 and exiting from the eastbound lane of I-94. 1971, 50 years ago: The Tessmer Oil Company building, which has been on the corner of 3rd and Broadway since 1925 (nearly 50 years) has been demolished. The location has been leased by Standard Oil Company and a new station will be erected on that site. United Telephone Company trucks are taking on a new look. H. James Boyd said the new vehicle color and markings are part of the new United Telephone System’s corporate identification program, now being adopted nationwide by member companies. Two more businesses have opened at Viking Plaza bringing the total number of businesses open there to five. The new two are Viking Plaza Barber and Beauty Salon. Both are open under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Wise.



RACHEL
BARDUSON
Observations from the Archives

1996, 25 years ago: The Downtowners group is ready to put up a billboard on I-94 to publicize the downtown, and are working with the Chamber and the Runestone Museum on the annual “Lighting of the Lights” ceremony at Big Ole on the day after Thanksgiving, just before Christmas in the Fort. The Chamber is looking into the possibility of putting up a second community billboard on I-94 and currently looking for sponsors. Insty Prints new owners, Dan and Robin Thompson, are moving into their new building at 1300 Broadway. Robin will also be moving her design business to the new structure which more than doubles the space of the present location. Deb Lokken is the Insty Prints manager. The Echo Press is pleased to begin a new service for its readers: weather forecasts which will include expected high and low temperatures as well as sky conditions. The Echo is obtaining its forecasts from expert weather sources on the Internet. 2011, 10 years ago: Alexandria firefighters battled a fiery crash on Highway 29 just south of the I-94 overpass when two semitrailers and a pickup truck were involved in a collision. The semis ended up in the west shoulder and ditch along Hwy 29. The violent collision caused an explosion, sending flames and a thick cloud of black smoke into the air, but

no injuries were sustained. The pickup traveled down a steep embankment but didn’t sustain much damage. The roads were frost covered and unexpectedly slick during the early morning hours on the day of the crash. Just For Fun, 1971 – 50 years ago: The Tessmer Oil Company building was built by Otto Tessmer and two other men from Glencoe back in 1925. Tessmer bought out his partners in 1927. In 1928 the road from Osakis to Alex was paved and the location happened to be right on the route. Tessmer added a lubrication wing in 1929. The lubrication wing served as a tire recapping business during WWII when tires were scarce. Tessmer himself got out of the oil business in 1951 when he began leasing his station to various oil companies. Sports Trivia, 1996 – 25 years ago: Alexandria’s Sarah Ekdahl is one of 12 players named to the 1996 All-State Volleyball Team. Ekdahl is one of five outstanding hitters named on the Class AA team; she totaled 415 of 507 attacks with 227 kills and had 120 of 137 tips good, 59 of which went for aces. She had a total of 42 blocks with 43 ace serves, adding up to 199 service points. In addition Ekdahl was named to the All-Central Lakes Conference volleyball team. Rachel Barduson of Alexandria is a regular contributing columnist to the Echo Press Opinion page.