

PROFILES

Volunteering is this senior's gig

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Shirley Goodwin of Barnum was honored as the Outstanding Senior Citizen at the Carlton County Fair in Barnum last month.

"It was quite the experience," she said this week as she prepared to head to the Minnesota State Fair Thursday for honors there.

Shirley and Kae Goodwin moved to Barnum 43 years ago when he was hired as a special education teacher in Moose Lake. They raised three children. Shirley worked at Northview Bank, attaining the position of manager before retiring in 2005.

Shirley has two philosophies about volunteering that she feels are vital in small communities.

First, she said that the award is not something a volunteer wins alone.

"I am president of sev-

eral organizations and have learned to delegate responsibilities," she said. "You find out where a person's comfort zone is and then ask them to work in that area. That's how you make an organization work."

Her second philosophy is that organizations need to work together in small communities, she said. "You tie things together to make them work."

Shirley is on the board of Barnum Community Education, which operates the Age to age program.

"We have the students meet in the senior citizens center and teach them sewing and cooking," she said. "I work with them on sewing. I am looking forward to working with the students again this year."

She is secretary of the Barnum area senior center.

"We own the building and have to do fundraising to pay the expenses," she

said. "The city and Barnum Township give us stipends but we have to pay the rest of the expenses ourselves."

Shirley is also president of the Peterson-Westerberg American Legion Auxiliary Unit 415.

"One gal is good at taking care of Poppy Day," she said. "We also are involved in Memorial Day activities."

The Barnum Area Community Club is another volunteer activity.

"We plan Spring Fever Days, but that didn't happen this year," she said. "We would have had to start planning in January. There was still a car show but it was held at the high school in the parking lot instead of the fairgrounds this year. That seemed to work out quite well. We also do the tree-lighting ceremony and activities before Christmas."

Shirley said that there is something for her to do

every day for all the groups she helps. "One day I might be washing dish towels for the senior center, and the next day I might spend half a day on computer work for another organization."

Shirley is also active in Emmanuel Lutheran Church and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

"I apply for \$250 grants from the Thrivent Action Team for the organizations that I am involved with," she said. "Those funds go a long way to helping with the various programs."

As she looks back on all of her years of volunteering, Shirley is grateful.

"I'm very grateful for all of the friends that I have made over the years," said Shirley. "I want to thank all of my co-workers and friends. Teamwork is so necessary to accomplish your goals, especially in small communities. You need to tie things together."



Shirley Goodwin is Carlton County's Outstanding Senior Citizen this year. She is a super volunteer in Barnum, where she has lived since she moved to the area 43 years ago. *Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News*

WRENSHALL SCHOOL BOARD



Backers of a petition to rescind a school board appointment met at the city park in Wrenshall Wednesday night to gather signatures. *Photo by Mike Creger / Pine Knot News*

Board member is under investigation

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A short emergency meeting of the Wrenshall school board Wednesday night resulted in a vote to begin an investigation into the actions of one of its own members. The investigation will focus on the special board meeting held the night before as board members and a public audience discussed Covid-19 protocols before the district opens school for in-person classes next week.

The issue of whether or not to require mask wearing by students and staff dominated the discussion. The board, after two hours, voted unanimously to keep mask wearing as an option and not a requirement.

Superintendent Kim Belcastro said that vote, and the way one board member presented themselves at the meeting, were at the heart of numerous phone calls Wednesday. She said parents of 16 students enrolled at the school told her they plan to remove their children from the district. That number is nearing about 5 percent of the student population at the small school that houses

students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

"There have been concerns raised regarding one board member in particular," Belcastro said in reading a prepared statement at the emergency meeting Wednesday night. "I discussed these concerns with the district legal council."

She said she was advised that an investigation of the school board member was warranted. She then called for the emergency meeting so the board could vote on whether to allow the investigation or not. Members voted unanimously to allow for the investigation.

The board member was not named and any details of the investigation will not be revealed until an investigator from the district's legal firm conducts interviews, reviews records and gathers other information in filing a final report for the board to review.

"The board will make the final decision on how to respond to the results of the investigation," Belcastro said.

The meeting Tuesday regarding masks was attended by parents and school staff, with

comments made on both sides of the issue of whether masks should be required or not. For the most part, the discussion was civil. One board member, Misty Bergman, showed explicit disdain for mask wearing and argued with some of those who came to speak in support of a mask mandate. Other speakers and two board members urged the discussion to remain respectful, no matter where one stands on mask wearing.

Other details of the Tuesday meeting can be found in today's Page 1 story on mask decisions by boards across the county.

After the emergency meeting, Belcastro said the investigation deals with board ethics. She also said it was obvious from the meeting on Tuesday night that there was a problem with how speakers were being treated by one board member.

The investigation will be conducted while a petition continues to circulate regarding a decision by the board earlier in August to appoint a new school board member after Michelle Blanchard became principal of the school and had to step down. Community members are

reacting to the lack of an open discussion or public candidate interviews by the board regarding the three or more people who showed interest in the open position.

The petition to reject the appointment is allowed under state statute regarding open board seats. It requires signatures from 5 percent of the voting public in the district, which equates to support from about 168 people.

As of Wednesday evening, after the second of two petition meet-ups in the past week at the city park, about 70 signatures had been gathered. State law says a petition has to be filed within 30 days of an appointment approved by a board. The board made its decision at its Aug. 16 regular meeting, giving the petitioners until Sept. 15 to file a proper document.

Should the petition prove valid, it would rescind the appointment as well as the appointee, Bill Dian.

Dian was at the first petition signing gathering at the Wrenshall city park pavilion Aug. 28. He said he and his supporters were there to ask residents why they disapproved of the board's

appointment.

Lisa Clarke, a parent of a student in the district and one who started the petition, said she felt intimidated by the presence of Dian and others, who she said confronted her about her motives. She was alone at the park and uncomfortable enough to call for police help. People had lined the driveway with vehicles, forming a gauntlet with political flags and queries that forced some people to turn away, Clarke said.

"I said they can be in the park, they just can't harass me or others," Clarke said at the second signature drive Wednesday, where there was at least one Dian supporter handing out fliers in support of his appointment.

Dian attended the special meeting on Tuesday and said he doesn't care one way or another how the petition drive goes. He has grandchildren in the school and he will still work to support the district, he said.

Look for updates on news about the Wrenshall school board at PineKnotNews.com or on our Facebook page.

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INSIDE

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CLOQUET'S LAST GASP OF SUMMER FUN

The Jack bar owner Adam Bailey (center) and his band of merry dancers practice their moves in advance of Monday's Labor Day parade in downtown Cloquet. The Jack dancers are an annual showstopper in the parade, which also featured numerous political floats along with many local residents, businesses and organizations. Find more parade photos on **Page 3** and a letter to the editor about the parade on **Page 7**.
Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News



NOT QUITE BACK TO NORMAL, BUT IT'S BACK TO SCHOOL



First-grader Finley White comes back for one final hug from his dad, Chris, before heading into Washington Elementary School and his first day of first grade Wednesday. His dad said Finley was excited to be back and not bothered by the idea of wearing a mask, but he and his siblings are always nervous when school starts. Most K-2 students across Carlton County started school Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

For more photos see Page 21. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

WRENSHALL SCHOOL

Board discord gets an airing

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The strangest rain cloud scuttled from the northwest to southeast across northern Carlton County Wednesday night. A narrow squall poured rain, cuffed by ragged and then bloomy cloud formations. Then, on both sides, clear sky. Arching through all of it was a clear, full rainbow, large enough to cover the entire city of Wrenshall and its environs.

Under the bright red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet was the school, where about 50 people ended up gathering for a school board meeting.

To say matters surrounding the board lately have been stormy is understatement. For those looking for some light, a rainbow of hope around a community and a board coming together to rally the school, there was some.

The committee of the whole meeting, designed to allow board members to talk about issues without taking action, was not normal by any stretch. The commons area at the school was filled with people anxious about what might be coming next from a school board that has been through some difficult times in just the past few months. The agenda for the meeting had changed twice. First it included a discussion with the district's attorney on the investigation of a board member for their conduct at a Covid-19 protocol special meeting Aug. 31.

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Wrenshall ...

Continued from Page 1

That meeting has led to at least 16 students withdrawing from the district, mostly, people at this week's meeting said, because of an ever-increasing exasperation with school board members.

Then the agenda changed. Nothing new in the investigation, so it was nixed. Added was an evaluation of superintendent Kim Belcastro. This set off alarm bells across the Wrenshall district in the 24 hours before the Wednesday meeting.

What did a sudden evaluation mean?

It turns out, board chairman Jack Eudy told the audience after a public comment period that included questions about the evaluation, everyone can relax. He said the pop-up evaluation came as a matter of course for the board, part of a months-long process that needed to get started in the summer or fall.

This came after several people vociferously backed the work of Belcastro and her commitment to the district, including staff, parents and even sometimes adversaries.

In the end, board member Debra Washenesky sug-

gested the whole thing be tabled until there was a full board and things cooled down in the community regarding board, administration, staff and community relations. Others agreed, and the board is expected to start the usually laborious evaluation process next month.

Strong stands

It was an emotional night for many. There were mea culpas from school board members and pleas for the board and the community to get its act together and start advocating for students, providing them with a stable environment for learning.

There was fierce defending, some more rumors, a little bit of finger-pointing, and yet another "I'm not a doctor, but" medical opinion on masks.

Eudy started the meeting with an apology, saying he let the meeting last week get out of hand. It focussed on mask wearing and community members who spoke at the meeting felt badgered and berated by board member Misty Bergman. The result of that meeting was an optional rule on mask wearing and then the subsequent investigation into an unnamed board member's actions at the meeting.

Couple all that with a community upset with the

way the board handled an appointment to its board after former chairwoman Michelle Blanchard became principal of the school. Residents have petitioned that decision — which came with no public discussion and fears of back-room dealing — and since gathered enough signatures to rescind the appointment. The board, if the petition is valid, would need to make another appointment.

Eudy has seen all of this happen in just the one month he's been leading the board.

"Our community is hurting right now," he said. It's time to "pull everyone together."

Bergman also apologized for what she called her "passionate" approach to Covid-19 topics. She first talked about being a parent and grandparent and all the damage that's been done to children since "Covid" entered the vocabulary. "I apologize that I was a little unruly," Bergman said. She loves the community, she said, "I want your trust." She hoped that everyone could get past the recent "bump in the road."

There have been so many disputes and they have come so fast, some forget that the school is still dealing with Covid and the prospects of getting through the school year with in-person classes. In

just the first two days, at least two students tested positive for Covid.

It's all making staff especially on edge with the desire to get things normal again. That has made many people anxious, social studies teacher Denise North said. She is president of the local teachers union and spoke to the board on its behalf Wednesday. She said the sudden appearance of an evaluation brought up many questions from district staff with the hope the board doesn't plan any major administration changes.

She said people need to remember what makes the Wrenshall district great, and that it requires "working together" because "it can cease in a heartbeat."

She said staff is all for evaluations, they make for accountability and should make people better at their job, she said. But staff just wondered about the timing, whether it was a bit of retribution from a board feeling stung by public opinion in the past few months. "Tell us what's going on before you start."

All pull together

Board member Nicole Krisak had already talked about the timing at the beginning of the meeting. She said she had received a packet about how the board was to go about the

evaluation just 24 hours before the meeting. She said the sudden nature of the evaluation does nothing to restore trust in the school board.

"We can't continue to point fingers," she Krisak said. "Let's work together."

Krisak stopped talking, too emotional to go on. The crowd offered the first of many rounds of applause of the night.

Superintendent Belcastro was able to speak up for herself while giving some of the regular updates on the first few days of school. Despite students being pulled from the district, there remains a comparatively healthy enrollment at the school: 382 students. That's "a lot for us," Belcastro said. She took the audience back to 2012, when she was hired after a turbulent time for the district. "It was broken," she said of the system then. She said things have improved dramatically, but the past few weeks have reminded her how beaten staff felt nearly a decade ago. She echoed the theme of the night, saying the Wrenshall district only works when people "work together."

"We're actually thriving," Belcastro said. She said she preaches teamwork because she's seen it work in making a better learning environment for students. "I'm not making it up."

Near the end of the public discussion, Krisak chimed in again, saying one person's advice to read the board member oath was a good idea because it talks about supporting students, staff, the community and administration. "We need to work together," she said. "We're scaring the community."

Outside the school after nearly two hours of talk, the sky had cleared, with only a few purplish clouds darting about. To the northwest, another ominous bank lurked.

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Learn more at enbridge.com/tribalinclusion.

How are Tribes being involved in this project?

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Board makes another pick to fill open seat

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The Wrenshall school board completed its do-over on the appointment of a new school board member last week. Eight candidates applied for the spot, including Ben Johnson, Karola Dalen, Cindy Bourn, Tony Sheda, Brandon Burt, Caroline Johnson, Janaki Fisher-Merritt and Ethan Harvey.

The second appointment came after more than 200 community members submitted a petition to recall Bill Dian, the person the board appointed in August without holding any public interviews or extended board discussion.

This time the board held public interviews in a special session following the Committee of the Whole meeting Oct. 13. The special session was only to interview candidates for — and appoint a new board member to fill — the open seat made vacant when board member Michelle Blanchard resigned in August to become principal of the Wren-

shall schools.

The eight candidates had completed written applications for the board position. Sheda withdrew at the beginning of the special session. Each of the remaining seven sat before the board to briefly answer a set of questions posed by Wrenshall superintendent Kim Belcastro. Her questions were said to be designed to help evaluate each candidate's availability to do the work of the board, and their understanding of how school boards work together to make and support decisions.

When the individual interviews were completed, with no interaction between the candidates and the board, members were asked by chairman Jack Eudy to make nominations. Three of the candidates — Harvey, Bourn and Johnson — were nominated by Nicole Krisak, Alice Kloepfer and Debra Washnesky. There was a bit of an awkward silence until a person in



Bourn

the crowd suggested that Eudy ask for seconds on the nominations. Of the three nominations, only Bourn received a second. There was no call for discussion after the second and Bourn was voted in, 4-1. Only Krisak opposed. Misty Bergman joined Eudy,

Kloepfer and Washnesky in favor of Bourn's appointment.

Bourn will be eligible to be sworn in seated after 30 days, or at the November regular meeting of the board.

She did not return a call from the Pine Knot News requesting comments on her appointment. When asked during her board interview about her previous volunteer service to the Wrenshall school district or the community, Bourn said, "I served on the (Wrenshall Schools) facility subcommittee for a year, working towards a third referendum." She added that outside of Wrenshall she has "served on multiple boards, had multiple roles and re-

sponsibilities in decision making (and) construction projects," as well as having served on the executive committee of her church board. Bourn previously ran for Wrenshall School Board in 2018, but was not elected.

Also in the last week:

- Superintendent Kim Belcastro reported Wrenshall school district enrollment was at 375 students (175 elementary, 200 secondary). Five students have had confirmed cases of Covid-19 this school year, including a member of the football team, exposing nine additional students who were then sent home. The football team has forfeited its past four games and will not field a team for the playoffs.

- Belcastro recommended the school nurse's hours be expanded to meet Covid-19 needs, and the district hire an additional long-term substitute paraprofessional as well as a four-hour-per-day cafeteria worker.

- Custodial and maintenance staff are receiving training and certification to support the

school's new boiler system. Two custodians were officially hired at the regular board meeting on Monday.

- Belcastro reminded board members that the board investigation report, stemming from a contentious meeting on Covid mitigation rules at the school in August, may be viewed only in the district office.

- Belcastro told the board that ongoing construction projects are making progress, with the gymnasium nearly complete and already usable. The multipurpose room should be usable by the end of November and cafeteria work is proceeding. Phase 3 planning for the industrial and graphic arts areas is underway, with work expected to commence in January and be complete by the end of May.

- On Monday, the board approved the district's 2021-2026 strategic plan.

CARLTON COUNTY

Board will vote Monday on new mask mandate

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As Covid case counts continue to rise here, Carlton County commissioners say they will vote on a mask mandate at the board meeting Monday, Oct. 25. The mandate would apply to public spaces inside county buildings, not the county as a whole, and is being considered after some county departments requested it. Other departments are not thrilled with the idea and the board itself appeared split on the idea Monday.

Some parts of the courthouse are already under a mask mandate after Minnesota State Supreme Court chief justice Lorie Gildea required that all people wear masks during court proceedings.

As outlined during Monday's committee of the whole meeting, the proposed mandate would require staff and visitors to county buildings to wear masks regardless of vaccination status. The mask requirement would be monitored weekly and required if "the county is experiencing substantial or high transmission status of Covid-19," as it is now.

Under the proposed policy, individuals are not required to wear masks if a medical or religious exemption applies. Staff may remove masks in office spaces if they can adequately maintain social

distancing. Masks may be removed in meetings with social distancing. County staff are expected to wear masks in the office if social distancing is not possible or staff are meeting with someone under age 12.

County board chair Tom Proulx asked that the mask mandate policy not go on indefinitely and that it be reviewed if it passes.

Bonding talks

Monday was also a meeting of the Justice Center project working committee, which continues to plan for the new combined jail and court system.

Arcelia Detert of PFM Financial Advisors of Minneapolis gave a presentation on financing options for the new construction. Cost of the bonding process for the financial advisor and the underwriter will be in the neighborhood of \$360,000 on a possible \$60 million project. She said this size of a bonding package will get the best interest rates in the public market.

Auditor/Treasurer Kevin DeVriendt said that there will be a five-month delay if voters approve the sales tax in November 2022. The first sales tax revenues would not come into the county until April 2023. It takes time for all vendors to be informed and adjust to collecting the tax on sales in their course of business. This lag is also figured into the bonding proposal.

Teens are focus in vaccination push

MPR News, Pine Knot News

Gov. Tim Walz toured a Covid-19 testing site in Duluth last Thursday morning — one of more than a dozen community testing sites around the state.

He said officials were getting ready to announce an additional expansion of testing capacity around the state as hospitals deal with another surge in Covid cases that are filling up ICU beds. Officials announced last week that the state was opening its 14th testing facility in Morris on Tuesday.

"We're going to massively expand our testing capacity across Minnesota again," Walz vowed.

The governor also said the state will launch new incentives to get 12- to 17-year-olds vaccinated. On Monday he released the details.

Those age 12-17 who get both doses of the vaccine now and up to Nov. 30 will receive a \$200 Visa gift card on completion of the shot cycle. Registration for the gifts will open on Nov. 9.

There is also a scholarship drawing for all Minnesotans age 12-17 who have been vaccinated in 2021. The state is offering five \$100,000 scholarship to Minnesota schools.

The Minnesota Department of

Health is also seeking donations of services, products and unique experiences to offer as incentives to encourage young people to get vaccinated.

The incentives are being promoted to 12- to 17-year-olds who are already eligible to be vaccinated and to 5- to 11-year-olds, who Walz said he anticipates will become eligible the last week in October or the first week of November.

"That will start to relieve some of the pressure," Walz said, before again urging Minnesotans to get vaccinated if they haven't done so. He said 87 percent of Minnesotans hospitalized with Covid-19, and all 25 deaths reported last Thursday had not been inoculated against the virus.

"These are the most tested and used vaccines that we have seen. They were decades in the development of this. And to not do so not only puts you, your family [at risk], but it puts your community at risk."

While Minnesota continues to slog through a difficult stretch of Covid-19, the most recent data offers fresh evidence that case counts, hospitalizations and community spread may be ebbing and that the summer-fall wave has peaked.

Known, active cases fell to 18,153

in Wednesday's numbers, the lowest count in three weeks. The seven-day average of newly reported cases also fell to its lowest point since late September.

Hospitalizations continue to pull back from their recent highs.

Bed counts had topped 1,000 recently, putting huge pressure on the state's short-staffed care systems, but hospitalizations dipped in reports posted Tuesday and Wednesday. There are 935 people in Minnesota hospitals now with Covid; 240 need intensive care.

State public health leaders continue to emphasize that Minnesota's Covid numbers are still relatively high and the state is not out of the woods yet. They continue to plead with Minnesotans to stay vigilant against the disease and get vaccinated if eligible.

It's "absolutely" possible the state may get hit with a fifth wave of Covid-19, Michael Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, said Monday.

Driven by the highly contagious Delta variant, the entire state now shows a high level of transmission, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

One-man battle on petition costs continues

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It's the petition that wouldn't go away, or perhaps it's just the angry district resident who won't go away. An obviously distraught Tony Sheda repeated his demands to the Wrenshall school board Monday night that the creators of the petition that denied an appointment to the school board last August be responsible for the costs incurred by the school district to verify the petition.

Despite repeated explanations and investigation of the issue that reached state offices in St. Paul, Sheda is yet to be satisfied, and apparently a majority of the board is unwilling to approve costs until he is.

Sheda requested and received an estimate of time spent by the district's filing clerk, Beth Peterson, on verifying the petition that successfully recalled the appointment of Bill Dian to the board in September. District residents balked at the secretive nature of the appointment, as the board had no public discussions about candidates or the process before choosing Dian.

The appointment was needed to replace Michelle Blanchard, who became the school principal last summer. Eventually, Cindy Bourn was appointed to the

board.

Sheda has insisted that the group that created the petition, Unite Wrenshall, pay for the estimated costs to verify it.

Ben Johnson, a board member who was appointed last month to fill Alice Kloepfer's seat as she takes medical time off, dug deep into the issue and offered a detailed report on Monday. He said he wouldn't support asking the petitioners to pay for expenses based on what he discovered.

In essence, he found after consulting with Carlton County officials, the auditor and attorney, and the Minnesota Secretary of State office, that Peterson is the duly assigned person to deal with the petition as part of her salaried duties. It means there was no real "cost" in verifying the position, as it fell under Peterson's job description.

The cost estimate Sheda received is \$179.50. Peterson's time spent on the petition was estimated as a cost of \$72. Legal consultation costs added \$107.50. Johnson went through a variety of state statutes that, though murky, back the idea that any costs fall under Peterson's duties, which are compensated through her salary.

That was the opinion of the Carlton County auditor's office as well, which provided some guidance on the petition process but

was not involved.

"It's part of the democratic process," Johnson said, referring to the petition and the district's duty to verify it.

Undeterred, saying he wasn't "buying it," Sheda insisted during the public comment portion of the meeting that he wants to see something in "black and white" showing that the petitioners are not responsible for a process that is allowed under state statute. He cited state law language that refers to an exclusion in the case of recalls of elected officials, but not appointment recalls, which dispute people selected by board members to fill out resigned terms. The appointment petition statute simply says that the petition needs to be valid under certain conditions, including 5 percent of the district's voting public in the last election and verified signatures and dates. The assumption is that the vetting process would be akin to the duties of the district elections official, Peterson, when it comes to verifying board elections.

Sheda repeated his notion Monday that the petition to recall Dian was a personal smear.

Dian was at the meeting Monday and said he isn't offended by the gossip around last summer's petition drive about his qualifications and the pro-

cess. He has said repeatedly that he simply doesn't want what happened to him to happen to anyone else, citing a passage in the words of the petition that the process to select Dian was done out of public view. The petition states that he was "interviewed privately by the board chair and a few school board members rather than holding a public interview process."

Lisa Clarke, parent of a Wrenshall student, was one of those who drove the petition. She said it was obvious in going door knocking that the community was upset that there "was no due process" in making the appointment. She stood by the words on the petition, saying they were based on board member comments and newspaper accounts of the process.

Dian said Monday what he has said for months. "I didn't meet with people. I never had conversations."

But in an interview with the Pine Knot News after the board announced his appointment, in which Dian was asked if he was surprised by the appointment, the Aug. 20 Pine Knot News reported: "Dian said he was 'not surprised' by the appointment because before the meeting 'they said I had four votes,' he said. (Jack) Eudy said it was (Alice) Kloepfer who first approached Dian. The new chairman then had a

few chats with Dian, deciding he would be a good fit for the board."

Sheda repeated Monday that the "lie" about Dian speaking with board members in private is what is driving his pursuit of the petitioners paying for the verification. Neither Dian or Sheda — nor board members — have disputed the Pine Knot's reporting on the conversations Dian had before the appointment.

Superintendent Kim Belcastro seemed irritated Monday night as the discussion about the petition continued. "I don't want to be beat up by community members," she said. Sheda has been at school offices repeatedly in the seven months since the petition was verified and deemed appropriate. Belcastro said there has been "plenty of abuse" cast her way.

She also said that as Sheda continues his pleas, the district is racking up even

more costs as Peterson continues to deal with him and, at times, attorneys are consulted.

Some board members seemed surprised that costs were continuing to mount and asked for an accounting of it.

Board chairwoman Misty Bergman said Sheda deserves a "black and white" answer but also called for "healing" among community members and district officials who should all be "getting over it."

The board tabled a vote that had been placed on the agenda to "approve recall petition expenses." Some board members said more discovery was needed to give Sheda an answer he can be satisfied with.

The \$179.50 being disputed, when divided by only the 3,274 people who voted in the last district election, culminates in 5 cents per voter. It breaks down to about 20 cents per household in the district.

CARLTON SCHOOLS

Board discusses deep budget cuts

Timothy Soden-Groves
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The Carlton school board met Monday, in large part to discuss again the possible cuts to meet a budgetary shortfall of about \$500,000. The board is looking to cut that deficit in half for next school year with changes in curricular and extracurricular offerings, staffing levels and superintendent benefits.

The committee of the whole meeting was for discussion purposes only, with ideas, questions and information exchanged freely among all six board members, superintendent and participating staff. Any decisions on budgetary cuts will still need to be voted on at a regular board meeting.

Superintendent John Engstrom reported that high school students had recently been queried about their interest in elective courses taught with students and teacher present in the same classroom

versus online only. Their responses showed that keeping in-person classes in art and business education were at the top of the list for many students. Engstrom said it takes 18 to 20 students in a class in order to not lose money for the district. For smaller classes, he has suggested greater use of Edgenuity, an online learning service that could offer students in sixth grade and up a wide array of courses that don't meet the 18-to-20 student threshold.

A lengthy discussion of Edgenuity followed, with the board agreeing to have a representative from the vendor speak and take questions via Zoom at the next board meeting March 21.

Principal Ben Midge said a reduction of one section at the elementary school and reducing elementary staff accordingly was likely for the next school year. Midge said the reduction would be partially tied to the incoming number of kinder-

garten students, which he estimated at about 19 for September. He said there will probably be just one section of fifth-grade next year, reducing the total number of K-5 sections at South Terrace Elementary from the current 10 sections to nine.

The possibility of reducing some staff levels — such as those in nursing — to their pre-pandemic levels was also discussed. Engstrom said two paraprofessionals had resigned their positions during the course of this year and that those two positions could be offered as a single position.

A reduction of "sixth assignments" for teachers could also save the district up to roughly \$26,000 per year, Engstrom said. These are assignments — such as an extra section of a class or a study hall — that teachers voluntarily fill and are compensated for.

Engstrom also introduced the topic of superintendent benefit reductions.

"I feel like it's important to cut something from the superintendent's position, as well. My recommendation is to keep the salary the same, but take the (retirement benefit) match for health and just eliminate it. That would save \$12,000 or \$13,000," he said.

The final area for potential reductions the board looked at was co-curricular activities. This included discussion of adding and reducing, or eliminating activities such as robotics (which didn't take place this year), coaching positions and sports. There was significant discussion of the merits of co-curricular activities and their importance to the student experience.

The next Carlton school board meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Monday, March 21. Board members will have the opportunity at that time to take comments from the public, review online curriculum offerings from Edgenuity, and possible vote on budgetary cuts.

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WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Board hears from unhappy residents

Jana Peterson
news@PineKnotNews.com

Nearly two dozen people attended Monday's Wrenshall school board meeting, none of them to address agenda items.

Four people spoke; two others belatedly said they wanted to give their time to the first speaker. That was Tony Sheda, a frequent speaker at Wrenshall school board meetings. The longtime resident repeated a litany of past complaints to the board, starting with the assertion that a petition that led to the removal of a board-appointed member, Bill Dian, last September was illegal. Sheda blamed "all the nastiness" and extra costs on Unite Wrenshall, the citizen group that gathered signatures to overturn a decision made by the board with no public candidate interviews. "You didn't interview Bill Dian, did you?" he asked several board members, who all nodded or said no quietly, until treasurer Nicole Krisak spoke up.

"As far as interviewing, no, there was no interviewing. Was discussion happened beforehand? Yes, discussion happened beforehand," Krisak said, adding that people discussed "on the phone" beforehand.

"We talked and said who was interested, nobody interviewed anybody," said Jack Eudy, board chair at the time of the appointment.

The petition that Sheda continues to dispute long after resolution stated that Dian was "interviewed privately by the board chair and a few school board members rather than holding a public interview process."

On Monday, Sheda also complained about statements made by Wrenshall superintendent Kim Belcastro during a March board meeting about the costs of staff time used to deal with his complaints and being "beat up" by community members. He claimed three local newspapers "ridiculed" him in stories reporting about the March meeting, holding up and reading excerpts from the stories, before asking the employee who

verified the petition signatures and who has spent work time on issues raised by Sheda if she had ever seen him. She didn't respond.

Sheda also repeated demands that a Wrenshall teacher be disciplined for speaking with him as he made his way from a meeting to the door. "I can't walk out of here and be harrassed all the way to the front door," he said.

Sheda told the school board that he had consulted with an attorney and the "Human Rights division of the federal government," and they had referred him to a federal attorney. Sheda "they're probably gonna involve the school."

The school board was quiet until Sheda exceeded his four minutes of speaking time, encouraging him to wrap up his speech when an alarm sounded. As he finished a minute or two later, board chair Misty Bergman assured Sheda the board was looking into his ongoing complaints and would "have a response."

Later in the meeting, board member Cindy Bourn said the board had decided during its "special" meetings — presumably referring to two closed board meetings on May 11 — that there would be "no more talking to the press."

"If the school wants the press to know something, we'll make a special statement," Bourn said, while other board members agreed. The new policy will include both board members and superintendent Belcastro.

Regarding the special meetings, public bodies are required to state the reasons for closing any meetings: the reasons given for the May 11 meetings were "preliminary consideration of allegations against an employee" and for "confidential discussion with legal counsel regarding pending complaint against school district." Neither agenda mentioned discussion of policies regarding school communications and the board took no action following each meeting.

Also unhappy

Speaking after Sheda, parent

Ethan Harvey told the board he was upset with the way they were acting.

"We're losing good teachers because of how several of you are handling things here. I'm frankly disgusted," he said. "You don't have the students in mind, you don't have our faculty in mind and it upsets the hell out of me," Harvey said.

Board member Cindy Bourn asked Harvey for specifics. "What are we doing that's upsetting the teachers?" she said.

"You have more focus on trying to shut this school down or reduce taxpayer dollars, in my opinion," he responded. "You do not focus on listening to our staff and listening to our students and having their education in their best interests."

Bourn interrupted Harvey several times, asking for specifics. The two discussed Harvey's assertions about a lack of support for school staff and administration, and things he said he's heard about teachers who want to leave because they're fed up. He pointed out the resignations announced earlier in the meeting, including the school activities director and two math teachers.

As the back-and-forth continued, Harvey eventually told Bourn he didn't want to hear what she had to say anymore. "These are my four minutes," he told, to which she responded that the board could subtract her speaking time from those minutes. Another board member told him she'd like to talk with him. "I'm just letting you know, the community is upset with a certain section of this board," he said.

Carol Anderson told the board they're doing a good job, then donated her time to Sheda.

Kudos to kindness

Annie Dugan then addressed the board, praising district staff for their work with her youngest son, and praising the mission statement and strategic plan the board had discussed earlier in the meeting.

"Because that strategic plan makes me feel like my student has

a spot here. And that your vision really is for all learners and all futures," Dugan said. "That kind of vision and leadership, you have truly worked with a superintendent that set the tone for that. I'm so grateful you have her leadership."

Dugan went on to talk about the "culture of kindness" at the school, and praised administrators and senior teachers for being able to recognize and find talent in potential teachers and staff.

She got the biggest applause of the night when she told the board: "I love that you put that mission statement of 'we,' because it's all of us together doing it," she said, talking about working as a team, and listening to all voices, including at the open forum.

"I'm so thankful to Belcastro and Blanchard and all of the teaching staff here and to the board for developing that amazing tradition. Thank you."

Also Monday, board members decided to hold a closed meeting to review principal Michelle Blanchard's evaluation prior to contract negotiations on May 25. Bourn suggested they also do Belcastro's performance review during the same closed meeting.

"It's the committee that negotiates the contract but they only do that if the board agrees to extend," Bourn asked Belcastro, who confirmed.

In other matters Monday, Wrenshall school board members:

- Adopted the Minnesota School Board Association's harassment and violence policy;
- Approved Luke Wargin as activities director to replace Jeremy Zywicki, who took a job with the Esko school district,
- Adopted the World's Best Workforce plan for the 2021-22 school year;
- Approved membership in the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative for the next school year.
- Superintendent Kim Belcastro presented service plaques and "Star of the Year" awards to a number of staff members at the start of Monday's meeting.

KNOT NOTES

Carlton principal is moving on

The Carlton school board is searching for a new principal after it accepted the resignation of Ben Midge at its meeting Monday. Under advice from superintendent John Engstrom, the district will seek to fill a position of elementary principal, which was Midge's job before tacking on the high school grades two years ago in a cost-saving measure for the challenged district.

Engstrom said he expects there to be some remaining responsibilities at the high school, likely 10 percent of the job for a new hire, for which he could fill in alongside a part-time principal at the high school.

"The timing is just right," Midge said Tuesday. He will return to southeastern Minnesota, in the Rochester area, as an elementary principal in the Dover-Eyota district. Before coming to Carlton five years ago, he taught for nine years in Plainview, just north of Dover and Eyota. He said he and his wife have always discussed returning to the area. The key was convincing his six children, who all attend Carlton schools, to make the move. "That was a big factor," he said. "They are doing well with it."

MnDOT: Highway project delayed

Construction on Minnesota highways 210 and 73 in Cromwell will be temporarily delayed, the Minnesota Department of Transportation announced last week. It did not provide details on why the project is delayed. "The new start date will be communicated as soon as possible but is anticipated to be at the end of May," MnDOT said in a press release. The detour will be put into place once the start date is scheduled and it will likely be in place into October.

Weekly update meetings at the construction site will be scheduled once work begins.

The project will reconstruct the existing highway and includes the following:

- 12-foot driving lanes and 10-foot parking lanes will be maintained on Hwy 210 from Hwy 73 to Burnett Road
- New storm sewer and curb and gutter to collect and convey stormwater runoff
- New sidewalk along Hwy 210 and along the west side of Hwy 73 adjacent to the Cromwell-Wright High School
- New lighting along Hwy. 210.

CITY OF CLOQUET

Building remains in stairway limbo

Mike Creger
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After another round of seeking funding to fix the failing outdoor back stairs to his apartment building, Roger Bruhn said this week that he has come up empty again. It likely means that by June 1, upper-level residents at the Victory Apartments will need to find housing after the city of Cloquet deemed the stairs a hazard and the top two floors "uninhabitable" without a fix. The stairs serve as the only direct exit for the upper floors of the building at 17 Eighth Street, across from the Pedro's restaurant building.

Cloquet community development director Holly Hansen said Tuesday that despite "a myriad

of loan resources," Bruhn is still not committed to fixing the stairs in the building that is part of city programs to provide low-income housing. He received notice in 2020 that the stairs needed to be repaired after some incidents were reported, including a tenant stepping through a failing tread.

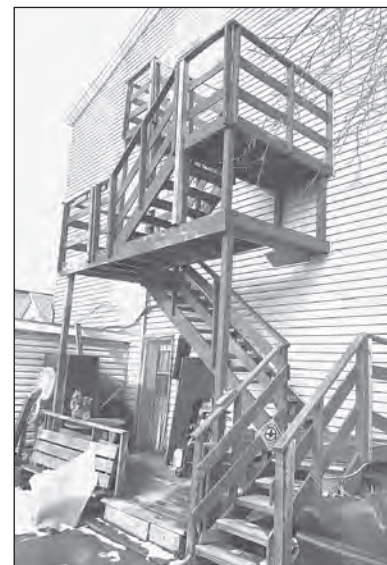
Hansen said "two weeks from now will be difficult for many." Finding low-income housing has been difficult recently, with few vacancies before the deadline at the end of the month. Bruhn said he didn't know the status of his tenants and had "no answer" about the fate of his building. He lives in Oklahoma, and a few years ago was trying to sell the building.

After significant media coverage last month, Bruhn said he made efforts three times for a

bank loan to fix the stairs, which he estimates will cost \$80,000 to repair. He also looked into suggestions for nonprofit and government program help and came up empty, he said.

Fixing the stairs doesn't add enough equity to a building with an estimated value of \$300,000, he said. There are nine units on the second and third floors of the building that will likely sit empty after the deadline. Bruhn said this week that a difficult economy is driving his lack of funding. He stated last month that the pandemic had also had an effect on his income from the 12-unit property, as some residents haven't paid rent while a moratorium on evictions remained.

"I don't know," Bruhn said Tuesday. "I have no answer."



The back stairwell at the Victory Apartments in Cloquet has been deemed too dangerous for use and the city has ordered it to be fixed or residents on the upper floors will be evicted by June 1. *Pine Knot News photo*

BARNUM SCHOOLS

Barnum hires new principal

Lois E. Johnson
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The Barnum school board hired Melisa Maxwell as the elementary principal at its monthly meeting Tuesday, May 17. Maxwell is currently K-6 Dean of Students in the Isle School District and will start with Barnum in July or August, after the new financial year begins. The board approved her appointment as part of its consent agenda vote, with no discussion.

Representatives of the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative spoke to the board and explained that there has been legislation to apply for \$6 million in state funding for a facilities project, totaling \$12 million, to house all of the cooperatives programs under one roof.

There are 12 member school districts in the cooperatives, with the superintendents from each district serving on the cooperative's board, explained Dena Hagen, cooperative director.

There was another piece of legislation for the cooperative that is in its third year at the legislature.

The cooperatives want to equalize funding to be more in line with funding for the programs in the Twin Cities area, said Hagen.

That would mean a levy lease increase of \$65 per student, which will bring in \$47,000. There would be a tax impact of \$3 or \$4 per year for a \$100,000 property, Hagen explained, if the funding from the state is approved.

She said that they would come back to each school board in the cooperative for approval if the request for state funding was approved.

In other business on May 17:

- Superintendent Mike McNulty presented a certificate to student Jennie DeCaigny in recognition for her service as the student representative for the school board.

- The board approved the internal assignment of Paul Riihiluoma from elementary interventionist to Title I teacher, approved the internal assignment of special education teacher Jill Juntunen to elementary interventionist, terminate Jaclyn Koehler, a probationary teacher, and hire her as the 0.45 Spanish teacher, effective Aug. 29, and approved the resignation of business manager Dawn Hultgren at an effective date to be determined.

- The board also passed resolutions to place Tony Bender on an unrequested leave of absence, Lauren Chapman on a 0.30 unrequested leave of absence, and Mariah Minkinen on a 0.45 unrequested leave of absence, approved capital expenditures of \$10,000 for a Type III bus for special education and \$14,000 to replace furniture in one classroom, and approved changing livestreaming of committee meetings to recording the meetings.

The Barnum school board meets next at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 14.

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Wrenshall board holds off on principal negotiations

Timothy Soden-Groves
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A special meeting of the Wrenshall school board took a surprising turn Tuesday evening when board members voted to postpone discussion of an extension to principal Michelle Blanchard's one-year contract.

While school boards typically perform annual evaluations of principal and superintendent performance in closed session, Blanchard had requested that Tuesday's evaluation meeting be open to the public. No public comment was taken.

Superintendent Kim Belcastro began by recommending that the board take action in the meeting to move ahead to contract negotiations with Blanchard, who will reach the end of her initial one-year contract on June 30.

Over the next 25 minutes Belcastro detailed her experience with Blanchard during the past year — Blanchard's first as a principal — while noting that having a PreK-12 principal was also a "new structure for the school district."

Before last fall, Belcastro was full-time, serving as both superintendent and dean of students. The district changed to a part-time superintendent and a full-time principal this year.

In her review, Belcastro said Blanchard has both administrative and teaching experience, "is an excellent communicator, is very organized and demonstrates an ability to work closely with staff, parents and community." She added that Blanchard "has a broad background in supporting instruction and is qualified for the work she is doing."

The superintendent also outlined challenges Blanchard and the school district will encounter in the coming year, listing streamlining the student behavior system, adding an in-school suspension component, teacher evaluations, and curriculum planning and development.

In summary, Belcastro said Blanchard has worked hard and "is ready" for a contract extension. "I can't recommend her enough."

The school board members then weighed in briefly with their own observations of Blanchard's performance.

Ben Johnson was impressed with Blanchard's "excellent job."

Nicole Krisak that after meeting with bus drivers, they were "all saying the same thing about you, that you're doing a good job. There are no major red flags, and I definitely recommend you for next year."

Debra Washenesky added that Blanchard "got kudos from all the bus drivers. They were thrilled with how you han-

dled [a discipline issue on the buses]."

Jack Eudy said, "I think you're doing your job."

Cindy Bourn asked Blanchard about her previous role as dean of students at a Duluth school versus the principal job in Wrenshall. Blanchard said that as a dean of students she primarily dealt with behavior issues, a statement which was met with nods and words of approval by other board members.

Bourn also asked about the heavy workload Blanchard has taken on, concerned that she might "burn out." Blanchard said she is "going to put in long hours, and that's OK. I take care of myself."

Board chair Misty Bergman congratulated Blanchard for her excellent work with the parent-teacher group Parents in Education, and for her work on teacher recognition. Bergman also related a personal interaction with Blanchard, telling her "you handled it really well."

Johnson then made a motion that the board enter into negotiations with Blanchard to extend her contract for two more years, with negotiations previously set

to begin the next day, Wednesday, May 25. Krisak seconded this motion and a voice vote was held.

Bergman, hearing some objections, held a roll call vote. Johnson and Krisak voted yes, while Washenesky, Eudy and Bourn voted no. Bergman had yet to vote when Eudy proposed that they postpone contract negotiations with Blanchard "for a short time."

Krisak asked for discussion about this, asking, "Why? We all didn't have anything negative against [Blanchard], so why wouldn't we go forward?"

Eudy stated he thought that "doing it tomorrow would not be beneficial."

"I would like to have more time to sit and talk about it," he said.

Krisak asked why the board would wait. "We only have five days of school left. What's going to change in five days?"

Eudy offered a motion that the board "wait until school is out. We're just postponing, not saying it's not going to happen."

Krisak asked again: "But my question is, why are we waiting?"

At this point Belcastro interjected. "Talk about the elephant in the room, Jack."

"It's not my place," Eudy said, adding that he felt the reason for the delay could not be discussed in a public meeting.

It was noted that Bergman had yet to vote on the Johnson motion. After some delay, Bergman voted no. Johnson's motion to negotiate for a contract extension with Blanchard the next day was defeated 4-2.

Eudy again motioned to postpone negotiations "for a short time period." Washenesky seconded the motion. On a roll call vote Johnson and Krisak voted no; Washenesky, Eudy, Bourn and Bergman voted yes, passing the motion 4-2.

In discussion after the vote, the board agreed to tentatively set June 2 as the date for contract negotiation with Blanchard.

The open meeting to evaluate Blanchard was adjourned after 45 minutes of discussion. The board did not — as Bourn proposed at its May 16 meeting — conduct any kind of superintendent evaluation Tuesday.

CLINIC OPENING DRAWS CROWD



Carlton County residents turned out in force Monday for the grand opening of the new Essentia Health-Cloquet Clinic at 1413 Highway 33 S across from Walmart. The two-hour event included a ribbon cutting (pictured below), comments by Essentia chief operating officer Brad Beard, an open house and free brats and hamburgers from local favorite B&B Market. Pictured above, B&B owner Jake Richardson was busy at the grill Monday, when the line for food stretched from the far side of the parking lot to the new clinic entrance. The new clinic has 12 exam rooms, one procedure room and one telehealth room, and offers family practice care with obstetrics, urgent care and additional specialty services, and laboratory and radiology services. Appointments can be made at EssentiaHealth.org, via MyChart or by calling 218-337-4000. Photos by Jana Peterson and Tony Matt



INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



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Full-on Fourth planned in Cloquet

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It's baaaack. After the Covid-19 pandemic led to a full-scale cancellation of Cloquet July Fourth events in 2020 and no activities at Veterans Memorial Park in 2021, organizers are planning for a return to normal in 2022.

Like last year, there will be a parade and fireworks, plus the Sawdust 5K and 1-mile race in the morning, a car show at the Northeastern Hotel and Saloon and a 3-on-3 basketball tournament at Pinehurst Park.

For the first time since 2019, there will also be activities in Veterans Park following the 11 a.m. parade and an outdoor movie in the park before the fireworks, also at Veterans Park.

"We really want to make July Fourth the place to go for families," said Jana Peterson, Fourth of July celebration co-coordinator and longtime July Fourth volunteer. "Bringing people back to the park is really important. Without that community gathering spot, it kind of ripped the heart out of the festivities."

The afternoon activities at Veterans Park will be familiar and mostly free. The Dash for Cash, when kids dig in sand or sawdust for quarters, will return, and so will the pie eating contest. There will be family-friendly fun ranging from the popular balloon toss to a three-legged race, wiffleball games and a variety of bouncies and inflatables from noon to 4 p.m. After that, things will slow down for a few hours before the outdoor movie starts around 8:30 p.m.



Fourth fun in Cloquet returns to Veterans Memorial Park this year, including an outdoor movie. *Pine Knot News*

Continued on Back Page

HATS OFF TO ESKO GRADS



A blue wave of seniors graduated from Esko High School Friday. And they made a little history. Find more photos and read about their big night on **Page 3**. *Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News*

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Principal contract OK'd; the rest is mystery

Mike Creger
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John Edison isn't a Wrenshall school board member, but for all practical purposes on Tuesday night, he was. The attorney representing the school district was on hand for public discussion on the fate of principal Michelle Blanchard and also for two closed sessions on "allegations" against two employees of the district.

The board approved another one-

year contract for Blanchard, on the advice of Edison, who provided the board a "confidential legal analysis" on how it might proceed with the principal.

"I'll make that motion," member Jack Eudy said without expressing what the motion was. Superintendent Kim Belcastro clarified, saying the motion was for the board to approve another one-year contract for Blanchard with negotiations to go through the superintendent, board chairwoman Misty Bergman, and

business manager Angela Anderson. That contract will be reviewed by Edison and vote on by the board.

Bergman said the discussion Tuesday, and delay in approving a contract after a public evaluation last month, wasn't about Blanchard, who has received mostly rave reviews about her first school year on the job. Wrenshall moved last year from a superintendent and dean administration to having a part-time superintendent and full-time principal.

Bergman told the board Tuesday that it was difficult to decipher how the new arrangement was working, considering the unusual circumstances at the school as it returned to in-person instruction after mostly online classes during the pandemic.

Other board members reiterated the praise for Blanchard, only to be shut down by Bergman, saying the discussion was about the position and not the employee.

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Fourth ...

Continued from Page 1

“We’re hoping to have musicians busking at the park, and other entertainment — music, magic and juggling and more,” said co-coordinator Ivan Hohnstadt. “We’re still looking for arts and crafts vendors, and anyone who wants to entertain.

Fundraising to pay for the daylong event is going well, Hohnstadt said, adding that the committee has raised enough to pay the nearly \$16,000 bill for the fireworks through donations from local businesses, organizations and individuals. Top donors so far include Sappi and Holy Smokes Catering, which donated \$2,000 each. At the \$1,000 level are Visit Cloquet, the Cloquet Eagles, Minnesota Energy Resources, and Wood City Motors. Kwik Trip and Upper Lakes Foods both donated \$750, Enbridge gave \$500, and \$800 is coming from the Carlton County “community get together” grant. Many other businesses and individuals have donated anywhere from a couple of bucks to hundreds of dollars.

“It’s great to see all the people, organizations and businesses pitching in to make this happen,” Hohnstadt said. “But we’re not done yet. We still need to pay for all the activities and entertainment at the park and things like portable buffies.”

The food trucks will return to Veterans Park as well, including mini donuts, corn dogs, cheese curds, kettle corn, ice cream and more. Holy Smokes will offer smoked meat sandwiches and Julie’s Eggrolls will be there, along with other local favorites.

Paid attractions include the popular bungee trampolines, along with helicopter rides that take off from a lot next to Veterans Park, flying over the city (but not the festivities).

Look for a flyover at the start of the parade, courtesy of the 148th Fighter Wing of the Minnesota Air National Guard of Duluth as well.

“Fingers crossed, the weather and the pandemic will be kind to us,” Peterson said.

Sawdust

Julie and Sam Jacobson have taken over the Sawdust 5K race and the 1-mile race before the parade from the founders of the July Fourth races, Jeff and Alyson Leno. The Jacobsons said they aren’t changing anything about the 11-year-old 5K race, which begins at 8 a.m. July 4 at Pinehurst Park, with a route that takes runners up and down the hills in the heart of Cloquet. Runners



will still have the option of doing the free Jimmer 10K as well, which involves running the 5K race, then reversing course for a total of 10 K. Find out more and register for the Sawdust at www.tempotickets.com/sawdust2022. Cost of registration is \$35 through June 28 and \$40 after that.

Basketball

Paul Cameron is again organizing a 3-on-3 basketball tournament at Pinehurst Park starting at noon on July Fourth. It’s a popular event for players and spectators, and a great place to watch some fun and intense half-court basketball games. Each team can have four players.

The double-elimination tournament is for all ages, Cameron said, noting that they saw more middle school teams come out in addition to the older players last year. There is no cost to play, but T-shirts will be available for purchase at the event to help pay for the event.

This is the third annual 3-on-3 basketball tournament, an idea dreamed up by Cameron and company because they just loved the city’s new courts at Pinehurst so much.

There will be awards for “best youngins,” tournament champs, tournament MVP and “most drip,” Cameron said. “That could be the way they play, or the way they show up and dress.”

Cameron said he’s gotten lots of help this year from Cloquet’s Jacob Diver, he said. More volunteers are welcome. Find out more via Instagram @pinehurstcourts or on Facebook at <https://fb.me/e/26nU1UX-BC>.

Car show

Bert and Judy Whittington will hold their 19th annual Fourth of July car show at the Northeastern Hotel, Saloon & Grille on Dunlap Island in Cloquet. The show runs 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is no entry fee and no classes. There are trophies and plaques for best of show, people’s choice and various “best” car categories, including Ford, GM, Mopar and Open Class (unrestored, Hot Rod, other corporations). Trophies will be awarded at 2:30 p.m.

Entrants get free coffee, toast and rolls during setup 8-10 a.m. and there will be grilled burgers and brats available for purchase along

with a full bar inside and beer outside.

Whittington said the fun won’t end with the car show. Crimsen Tied (Ryan and Crimsen Hanson) will play 6-10 p.m., and all are invited to stay for the fireworks that follow.

Find out more

In addition to the Facebook page at Cloquet 4th of July Festival, there’s a new website at cloquetfourthofjuly.com, where people can check out the schedule, download parade entry forms and quickly link to registration information for the Sawdust 5K and the 3-on-3 basketball tournament.

The push is on, Hohnstadt said.

“We have only a few weeks left to put the finishing touches on this, so if you’ve been planning to donate, please do so,” he said. “Every dollar counts. If every resident in the city of Cloquet contributed \$2.50, the event would be paid for.”

Donations can be mailed to or dropped off at the Pine Knot office at 122 Avenue C in Cloquet; address envelopes and write checks to Cloquet Fourth of July.

Editor’s note: The Pine Knot News was hired by the city of Cloquet to coordinate this year’s festival with the July 4th committee. Read more about that on Page 8.

Wrenshall ...

Continued from Page 1

It was difficult to follow just what the purpose of the meeting was. The board met last month for an evaluation of Blanchard, with similar glowing remarks, but board members then voted to delay the decision on a contract. The agenda stated that the special meeting Tuesday was for “discussion regarding future of principal position and status of principal contract.”

The district, according to Belcastro, saved about \$10,000 by cutting the dean position, adding a principal and cutting the superintendent position by nearly half.

The board members went back and forth talking about Blanchard and the position during the open portion of Tuesday’s meeting. But there was no discerning discussion about how members felt about the new administrative arrangement.

Edison brought things back into focus by saying there were three options regarding Blanchard. No action would indicate an automatic renewal of the contract. The board could also choose to not renew, which it would have to do before the July 1 end of the school year. The third option, which the board seemingly agreed to adopt, was to renew and negotiate.

Closed session

After voting unanimously to renew and negotiate, the board went into two closed meetings “for preliminary consideration of allegations” made against employees. The

The official motion states it was a ‘motion to proceed as discussed in closed session 1 and 2’

first, according to people in the district with knowledge of the situation, was about a threat made by an employee regarding superintendent Belcastro. The second non-public discussion was about allegations brought against Belcastro, made by the employee who allegedly made the threat to the superintendent.

Board members discussed the allegations for more than two hours with Edison, the district attorney. When it came back into open session, a motion was made to “proceed” according to what was discussed in the closed meeting. There was no explanation and Edison, contacted after the meeting on Wednesday, refused to elaborate on the motion. “There was a motion to proceed, and that’s all I’m going to say,” he said.

The official motion, offered Wednesday by the district’s official notetaker, after vetting by Bergman, states it was a “motion to proceed as discussed in closed session 1 and 2.”

Bergman, who is now considered the sole media contact for the district, echoed the same phrasing from Edison and the meeting notes and did not elaborate.

The board voted unanimously in favor of the unexplained motion following the closed meetings.

Mark Anfinson, an

attorney who represents newspapers through the Minnesota Newspaper Association, said “adopting a motion without any discussion that describes the basic content and character of the motion constitutes a pretty brazen affront to the Open Meeting Law.”

That’s the Minnesota law that guides public bodies on how to conduct public meetings and the exceptions: closed meetings. “Whether the board’s behavior violated the (law) depends on whether it decided to impose some form of discipline on either of the employees discussed in the closed meeting,” Anfinson said.

It isn’t clear what the board decided, as the motion was to simply “proceed” as apparently outlined by Edison in the closed session.

“If the board did decide to impose some kind of discipline, then it’s evident that the discussion in the closed meeting went way beyond preliminary consideration, because the board would have had to conclude that discipline of some kind may be warranted and, according to the statute, at that point, further meetings were required to be open,” Anfinson said.

In any case, he said, the board was “obligated to describe the substance or character of the motion when it went back into open session.”



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INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



It's a summer fun guide!

Pullout



Athletes find state wins

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New team runs race

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CRIME & COURTS

Judge: Life sentences for Thompson

Jana Peterson
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Once the jury found him guilty, there was never any doubt that Sheldon Thompson would be sentenced to life in prison for brutally killing his pregnant girlfriend, Jackie Defoe, their unborn child, and Jackie's 20-month-old son, Kevin Lee Shabaiah Jr., in March 2020.

How many life sentences he would get was the question.

The sentencing hearing Tuesday at the Carlton County Courthouse came just over two weeks after Thompson was found guilty of eight counts of murder on May 31.

Thompson was charged with murder in the first degree-premeditated for the deaths of Defoe, Shabaiah and the unborn child. He was also charged with murder in the first degree while committing domestic violence with a past pattern of domestic abuse of Defoe and Shabaiah. He also faced two charges of murder in the second degree for Defoe and Shabaiah and murder in the second degree of an unborn child-intent, not premeditated. The first-degree murder charges carried with them a penalty of life imprisonment, while the second-degree murder charges have a maximum penalty of not more than

40 years imprisonment.

The murders were violent. Jackie Defoe's throat was slashed; she was also stabbed more than 30 times in the back, 60 times in total. Shabaiah was also brutally murdered: his skull and jaw fractured, legs broken, evidence of either strangling or choking on his blood.

Carlton County attorney Lauri Ketola argued for three life sentences to recognize each victim.

"It's true he only has one life, but he took three," Ketola said.

Defense attorney Steve Bergeson said justice should be "meted out with rationality and a sense of balance" and the sentences should be

served at the same time.

"It makes no sense — in any measurement — that someone can give more than one life," he said. "Which is why I ask for concurrent sentences."

Judge Jill Eichenwald said her decision on consecutive sentences was an easy one. "The murders were separate and distinct," she said. "In my head, there's no justification for dealing with [those deaths] on a concurrent basis," she said, stressing that legally consecutive life sentences would not "result in punishment out of proportion to Sheldon Thompson's offenses."

Continued on Page 7

DANDY LYING



Next week is International Pollinator Week. AJ Miller, owner of Drone Grown Photography, captured this photo of his 4-year-old daughter in the family's backyard in Cloquet. "We participated in "no-mow May," and I thought it would be fun to take some photos in a sea of dandelions," Miller said. "My daughter, Livia, jumped right in. I powered up my drone and took to the skies." That's when he captured this unique photo of Livia and entitled it, "Dandelioness." She was awestruck by the photo and immediately felt like a movie star, he said. Miller calls aerial photography a therapeutic and liberating experience. "Piloting drones offers a bird's point of view and by which I'm able to share with others a different and sometimes unusual perspective."

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Board leans toward inquiry

Mike Creger
news@PineKnotNews.com

After more than 50 people showed up at its last meeting, the Wrenshall school board held its regular June meeting in the commons area of the school instead of the cramped library. A microphone was deployed so a similar-sized audience could hear what was being discussed Monday.

But when it came time to talk about the current controversy consuming the board, the microphones went unused and the mumbled conversation that ensued was difficult to hear even on a playback of a recording.

The Monday meeting began like many of the board's meetings do these days, with items added to the agenda. And this time, it wasn't something small. Chairwoman Misty Bergman said the board would consider, as the last item on the action agenda, hiring an investigator concerning the "allegations" discussed in closed sessions on June 7.

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MINUTES OF THE CLOQUET SCHOOL BOARD MEETING HELD MAY 23, 2022

N. Sandman seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by N. Sandman to approve the 2022-2023 College in the Schools memorandum agreement with the University of MN, Duluth, as presented. T. Lammi seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by K. Scarbrough to approve the 2022-2023 Carlton County agreement for the provision for family school support works services, as presented. T. Lammi seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by M. Juntunen to approve the lease of 1,100 Lenovo Chromebooks to Cloquet High School with SHI and Vantage Financial, as presented. G. Huard seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by N. Sandman to approve the Laserfiche proposal with Momentum ECM, as presented. K. Scarbrough seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by G. Huard to approve the 2022-2023 insurance rate from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, as presented. N. Sandman seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by N. Sandman to approve the summer 2022 lawn care services with The Smith Company and RNR Yardworks, as presented. T. Lammi seconded the motion. A roll call vote was called: T. Lammi-yea, N. Sandman-Yea, G. Huard-nay, M. Juntunen-yea, K. Scarbrough-yea. The motion passed by a 4-1 vote.

RESOLVED by N. Sandman to approve the installation proposal from Wolf Track Energy for the potential MN Solar for Schools grant project (pending grant award), as presented. T. Lammi seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

RESOLVED by G. Huard to approve the 2021-2022 Cloquet Wellness Policy #533, as presented. M. Juntunen seconded the motion, and the resolution was approved by unanimous yeas of all members present on roll call.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Cary reviewed all items during the working session.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Staff Retirements – Congratulations on Your Retirement
- 2022 Staff Years of Service Recognition Awards – Thank you for Your Years of Service!
- Cloquet District Summer Office Hours
- Internal transfer of a special education teacher and math teacher to instructional coach positions at Cloquet High School.

UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

- Thursday, May 26, 2022 – CAAEP Graduation, 2 p.m.
- Friday, May 27, 2022 – Cloquet High School Graduation, 6:00 p.m.
- Monday, June 13, 2022 – Regular School Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. / 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being nothing further to discuss, Board Chair Ted Lammi adjourned the meeting at 6:28 p.m.

PKN June 17, 2022

MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS ACADEMY COOPERATIVE BOARD MEETING HELD MAY 6, 2022

Present: Mike McNulty, Barnum Superintendent Wayne Whitwam, Hermantown Superintendent Dr. Michael Cary, Cloquet Superintendent John Engelking, Proctor Superintendent Jay Belcastro, Lake Superior Superintendent John Engstrom, Carlton Superin-

tendent Nathan Libbon Crom-Wright Superintendent Kim Belcastro, Wrenshall Superintendent Brad Johnson, McGregor Superintendent Wayne Whitwam, Hermantown Superintendent Bill Peel, Willow River Superintendent Billie Jo Steen, Moose Lake Superintendent Aaron Fischer, Esko Superintendent Dena Hagen, Director of Spec. Education Barb Mackey, Asst. Spec. Ed. Director of NLA Jill Morberg, Business Manager Raeanne Bergren, Head Secretary NLA Absent: none

Call to order 10:30 am. Called to order by Superintendent A. Fischer

Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve agenda Superintendent McNulty. Second by Superintendent K. Belcastro. Motion carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda

- Board Minutes
- Regular Board Meeting April 7, 2022 (Attachment A)
- Payment of Bills and Treasurer Report (Attachment B)
- NLA bills: \$8498.88 NLSEC bills: \$7966.75
- 2022-23 Renewed Lease with Our Savior's Church (Attachment C)
- increase to \$1000/mo for rent (just under 5%) and \$21/day for cleaning from \$19/day. Motion to

approve Consent Agenda items by Superintendent Peel. Second by Superintendent J. Belcastro. Motion carried.

Approval of FY23 Planning Budget (Attachment D)

- Reviewed budget differences between last year and this projected planning budget. Discussed the tuition bill rate for 2021 was \$105/ day.
- Motion to approve FY23 Planning Budget Superintendent M. McNulty. Second by Superintendent B. Steen. Motion carried.
- Review of JPA Language and School Board Members
- The NLA Joint Powers agreement states that each member district will have two reps. One Superintendent and one Community Board Member. Currently four districts have board members that attend meetings – Cloquet, Esko, Barnum and Carlton. Subcommittee Reports
- Facilities (Peel, Engstrom, J. Belcastro) Still waiting on a legislative tax bill which we hope contains additional lease levy authority for cooperatives and the NLA bonding bill. The 2022 session ends on May 23, 2022.
- Programming (K. Belcastro, Steen, Whitwam) no report this month.
- Finance (Libbon, McNulty, Johnson) met on 5/6/22 to review planning budgets before meeting of the whole board for approval.
- Personnel (Fischer, Cary) no report this month.

Directors' Report – Barb Mackey, Dena Hagen Celebrations – Staff are doing

amazing work trying to problem solve through some really tough behaviors. Students meeting and making progress on goals. Congratulations to Dena Hagen, Barb Mackey, Amiliya Calverley, Emily Brown, Morgan Sailsbury and Darrell Davey on five years of employment with Northern Lights Academy.

Covid-19 Update – Masking is optional for both locations. We will continue to offer testing if needed. Slight increase of cases again in the community. Student Enrollment (Attachment F) – Setting 4: Twenty-nine currently enrolled, 3 openings. NLA Carlton Day Treatment: 8 students enrolled, 3 on waitlist, no openings. Working with case coordinators for next year's enrollment and additions.

Next NLA Board Meeting Wednesday, June 8, 2022-9 a.m. Google Hangout

Adjourn – Motion to adjourn meeting. Motion to approve by Superintendent B. Johnson. Second by Superintendent J. Engstrom. Meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

PKN June 17, 2022

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Brevator Township will be holding a public hearing in regard to imposing an aggregate materials tax in the township, per State Statute 298.75. The hearing will be held on June 29, 2022, at 6 p.m. at the East Brevator Town Hall, located on Morris Thomas Road.

PKN June 17, 2022

Wrenshall ...

Continued from Page 1

That meant the board did, indeed, approve an action after the closed sessions but did not reveal it to the public at the time. It's a violation of the state open meeting law and Bergman, when asked, refused to discuss what had changed in six days that moved the board to finally adhere to state statute.

The plan is to investigate, according to people in the district with knowledge of the situation, a threat made by an employee regarding superintendent Kim Belcastro. The second non-public discussion was about allegations made by that employee about Belcastro.

Board member Cindy Bourn said more allegations have surfaced but didn't elaborate on whether they would be added to the investigation. When asked if the investigation contract would cover both items discussed in closed session the week before, Bourn said, "I believe" that was the case, as discussed with John Edison, the district's attorney from the firm Rupp, Anderson, Squires & Waldspurger.

Bergman said Edison recommended the company for the contract with the district, Terch & Associates, based in Duluth. Board member Nicole Krisak said the contract had been given to members just before the meeting and she wanted time to consider it.

Board member Ben Johnson understood what was part of Krisak's concern: a conflict of interest question concerning Justin Terch, head of the investigative firm. Terch, according to the board conversation, is a member of the Carlton County Republicans. Bourn serves as a vice president in that group. She said the conflict was determined to be moot, according to Edison, because, apparently, she had limited contact with Terch.

Tony Sheda is a chairman of the political group and Bill Dian is also on the executive roster posted by the group. Sheda is a

district resident who has been outspoken about activities surrounding the controversial appointment of Dian last August, a watershed event that has dispirited many residents and employees of the district. Bourn eventually became the alternative to Dian after a petition was successful in negating the appointment of Dian.

Bergman told the Pine Knot News on Tuesday that the district's attorney, Edison, "recommended using Terch & Associates for the investigation based on his law firm's previous experience with Mr. Terch's investigations for other Minnesota school districts. Another reason Mr. Edison recommended Mr. Terch is that Mr. Terch works in the area and would not need to travel from the Twin Cities metro area."

Terch is a Cloquet resident. "I do not know of any board member who has had contact with Mr. Terch," Bergman said. "Mr. Edison reached out to Mr. Terch on behalf of the district. I am not going to comment further on Mr. Terch because this situation is not about him. Simply put, he was recommended to the board by legal counsel as a qualified and experienced outside investigator."

Terch said he had no comment and referred questions to the district.

Bergman did not elaborate on how it was decided there wasn't a conflict. She was asked if even the whiff of a conflict was enough to reconsider who should be hired to investigate matters relating to the district. She did not respond.

During the meeting, board member Jack Eudy opined that options for an investigator are limited in the area and that he was sure "politics" wouldn't enter into an investigation. He said he was sure there would be a "professional" job done.

Krisak said the board should still try and find out if, indeed, there are other options. She said she remains fully in support of an investigation, "I'm just not sure about the person."

"I just want to discuss it, that's all," Krisak said.

The board eventually unani-

mously agreed to table the item to pursue other options and perhaps have conversations with potential investigators. The contract that was tabled called for an investigation to not exceed a cost of \$10,000 unless more costs were authorized by the board.

In the closed sessions on June 7, it was stated that the board was discussing two instances of allegations against an "employee." The investigation contract language uses the term "district representative." When asked about the discrepancy and the meaning being construed that board members are being investigated because they are the sole representatives of the district, Bergman did not respond.

The Pine Knot News asked Carlton County Sheriff Kelly Lake if law enforcement has been involved in the allegations. She said Wednesday that "we do have one report from May 20, 2022, from Wrenshall schools reporting a threat made. The reporter wanted (it) for (a) matter of record, so nothing further was done on our end other than the report for documentation."

On Tuesday, Bergman responded to a few of many questions asked of her by the Pine Knot News.

"There are allegations against superintendent Kim Belcastro and against technology director Jamie Hopp," she said. "The status of those allegations is that they are under review. I am not aware of any law enforcement involvement in any of the allegations."

Official contract

Also added to the agenda was the approval of Michelle Blanchard's contract as principal in the district. The one-year contract was approved. It had been vetted by Edison and Belcastro, and business manager Angela Anderson sat down with Blanchard to hammer out the details. Because Blanchard receives no health care coverage through the district, the value of that was added to her base salary for a total of \$88,324. Blanchard also requested a notice by April 1 if the board planned any administrative changes that would alter

the principal job description or moves to eliminate it.

Budget

The board approved a deficit budget for the next fiscal year of about \$1.1 million. Anderson, the business manager, said "it's OK," when the number came up. She said the deficit includes costs for building projects at the school that fall into next year's budget. Those costs would eventually be covered by district taxes. About \$950,000 of the deficit budget is under those building costs, so the approved budget "looks worse than it is," Anderson said.

Public comment

There were several pleas made during the public comment portion of the meeting for the board to do a better job in its work, especially when it comes to the reputation of the school following several incidents of discourse from members with the public. Some were teachers, some were parents or residents. They also didn't use a microphone, but could be heard loud and clear.

They all received plenty of applause as the board took the words in without comment.

Second-grade teacher Niki Rowland is in her 11th year at Wrenshall. She said the school has historically been referred to as a "hidden gem" in the era of open enrollment. "Our school is no longer viewed this way," she said. She said comments and actions from the board were changing perceptions and the district "deserves better."

Teacher Suzy Berger said she's heard "racist, homophobic, inappropriate and unprofessional" comments from school board members and has felt "disgusted and ashamed" about it and the fact that she wasn't speaking out against it.

"I'm done being complicit," Berger said. "Our students deserve role models that will stand up for what is wrong with our school, and it starts with me."

Sports teams

There were also calls to support fully joining with Carlton in all sports. This spring, there have been discussions about a more

robust sports cooperative under the Raptors name, the latest being a possible baseball pairing. It was spurred by the budget crisis in Carlton and its efforts to pare costs. Speakers on Monday said there should be no hesitation in combining the remaining sports, which would be volleyball and basketball. They urged forgetting about alliances and producing more competitive teams.

"Combine, and get this over with," Wrenshall baseball coach Aaron Lattu said.

Volleyball coach John Peterson echoed those sentiments, and brought several of his players to the meeting as support as well.

The Raptors football program will be without a varsity team in the fall because of a lack of participants.

Questions unanswered

There are many questions that have been posed to Wrenshall school board chairwoman Misty Bergman, who also acts as the media contact for the district. In the past two months, the Pine Knot News has adhered to a policy the board discussed about no one talking to the media except for Bergman. While Bergman has answered a few questions, she has ignored many more.

Bergman provided some answers on Monday about the proposed contract and status of the "allegations" regarding two people. She said she was unable to answer others based on data privacy laws and privileged discussion with the district's attorney, John Edison.

The Pine Knot News reached out to Bergman to clarify why she wasn't answering questions that did not seek personal information or had anything to do with the allegations.

"You are not answering questions that don't call for personal information, or have anything to do with the two cases of allegations, based on the advice of the district attorney?" the Pine Knot asked. "Including clarifications of statements made in public meetings or procedural questions? We'd like to get the reasoning correct."

She did not respond.

OUR VIEW

A simple solution for Wrenshall woes

What is wrong in Wrenshall? That's a question that has been vexing anyone following the actions of the district school board in recent years.

As it was stated at Monday's regular board meeting during the public comment period, Wrenshall once had a reputation as a small and efficient place to get an education, a "hidden gem."

Today, that status is damaged. While often there can be myriad reasons for discord in a small community, in this case there is just one: a mostly dysfunctional school board.

It's a board with members who have insulted community members, injected politics into supposedly nonpartisan representation, uttered racist and homophobic words, allowed community members to harass and threaten those with different ideas, and allowed all things regarding the board to spiral into a web of conspiracy theories, community gossip, and personal beefs writ overly large.

All this has left the community bereft.

Set aside, for a moment, the personalities on the board today. As was stated by a former school member on Monday, there are some basic problems with how the board runs what usually is routine business. It's obvious that illegal discussions are happening before meetings when deciding things. And in the rare times there is a full discussion, it is often couched, coded and indecipherable.

As stated Monday, members of a school board need to represent the best interests of the school. They need to know what is happening in the classrooms, with employees, and with the district's future. They need to do the work.

The maddening thing about today's Wrenshall school board is that for all of its machinations and distractions, one would assume a sort of end goal. But there doesn't seem to be one. It has members who seem to be good at creating chaos. When facts, rules and public rebuttal are entered in, they simply slink away without explanation or apology. Nothing is gained, but damage is done.

We are all for the idea of elections having the ability to change things. We certainly know that the elections in 2020 greatly played a part in where the board is today. Teachers and parents in the district are rallying people to run for three open seats and will host a candidate forum to talk about education issues before the election in November. We urge anyone with a yen for making things better to run for a seat.

But remember, public service is hard work. If you are there for a singular issue or mindset, think again. It is work, and if it doesn't get done, you won't have a school district to represent.

Right now, the board has members who aren't doing the work or don't know how to do it. We have a simple request for them if they can't begin to better handle their positions. Resign.

Express yourself

Send your thoughts to:

news@PineKnotNews.com

Happy Father's Day



Joellelor@2022HEART.COM

A decade ago, it rained and rained and rained

It began raining at midday on June 19, 2012. Five inches and about 10 hours later, I found myself driving in the heart of what has simply become known as the 2012 flood.

I had been working two jobs. One was for the weekly newspaper in Two Harbors and another was for the daily News Tribune in Duluth. When I pulled off the expressway coming back from Two Harbors and into Duluth, I called the News Tribune office and reported what I had seen. Water was covering blocks and blocks of Superior Street and it was rushing down the avenues. Debris was everywhere. For all I know, my report became the first journalistic account of what was to be a historic and catastrophic event in the region.

Official records state that the rain started around noon on that Tuesday and didn't stop until 24 hours later on June 20. More than 10 inches of rain had fallen in the Two Harbors area and I was lucky to have returned to Duluth without putting my car into a crevasse created by the rain. There was slightly less rainfall over Duluth, but its physical features, being a city on a series of hills, meant rushing water in its many streams, some open, some buried years before under the city streets, and down the avenues tore infrastructure apart.

Nearly 8 inches fell in northeastern Carlton County.

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the St. Louis River at Scanlon rose 11 feet and hit a record crest of 16.62 feet, breaking the old record of 15.8 feet set on May 9, 1950. Some evacuation of homes was necessary.

I was assigned to cover the record water levels in Thomson and the damage caused to the bridge,

dam and the road to Jay Cooke State Park, where parts of the famous swinging bridge had been swallowed up and swept away by the river.

The school in Moose Lake flooded, eventually leading to a new campus there after years of trying through referendums. Mother Nature often speaks louder than any of us can. Streams and rivers throughout Carlton County hit high-water marks.

Roads were washed out all over Carlton County: County Road 4 in Mahtowa, near the Minnesota Highway 210 bridge, and University Road on the Fond du Lac Reservation.

The county highway department reported 318 damaged sites and 42 road closures.

There were the crazy and imprinted photographs of animals floated out of the Lake Superior Zoo, including a seal on a roadway looking bewildered and so out of place. There were cars tipped into gaping holes in the streets. Bridges disappeared, parking lots collapsed.

Viewing the damage in Duluth and later in other parts of the region, after the rain subsided that Wednesday, was like looking at war zones I had only seen in books and on TV.

In Moose Lake, the water kept rising after the rain stopped, and parts of the city were islands popping up from a brown sea.

Duluth hadn't seen such flooding since 40 years earlier, when a series of August rainstorms led to similar problems with overflowing creeks and eroded streetscapes. Just as then, one person ended up getting sucked into a culvert and survived a wild ride down it. I interviewed the man who as a boy had that experience in 1972 in the Miller Hill area of Duluth.



Mike Creger

One reason for all that rain in 2012 was the giant body of water that often protects Duluth.

As we saw earlier this week, Lake Superior creates some bizarre weather patterns in the region. While the rest of the state broiled in humid, 90-degree weather, people in downtown Duluth, Canal Park, and in Superior, saw temperatures barely getting over 50 all day Tuesday.

In 2012, something akin to what we see in record snowfalls happened. Think of the infamous Halloween blizzard in 1991. The rain hit Lake Superior and just started swirling over the region. For 24 hours.

There have been more floods and, most recently, drought in the area since those historic days a decade ago. The rapid up-and-down cycles in weather are seen as examples of our changing climate, mostly man-made with the emissions we put into the atmosphere. What used to be seemingly one-off, history books events are now becoming more common.

The 2012 flood was exacerbated by one of the wettest Mays on record for the region.

It's important to remember these events, and do what we can to stem what scientists have warned us about.

As a father, I certainly think more now beyond my mortal existence on the earth. I enjoy the perverse anomalies in weather we see around the region. I couldn't help but laugh as the 4-year-old and I tried to take in a baseball game Tuesday night in 50-degree weather and a stiff breeze. We made it through the third inning. That was my first game with her. I'm hoping we can get a whole game in soon.

Mike Creger is a writer, copy editor and designer for the Pine Knot News. He can be reached at news@PineKnotNews.com.

Interns part of 'pipeline of talent' into Sappi

Jana Peterson
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Recent Cloquet high school grads Grant Nordin and Caleb Hansen are already on track to go to college for free and land jobs in the maintenance department at the Cloquet Sappi mill once they complete their coursework. The jobs would likely pay between \$32 and \$35 an hour to start — not bad, for a two-year degree.

Hansen and Nordin are the first two Cloquet students to take advantage of Sappi's new Minnesota Dual Training grant for advanced manufacturing from the state's Office of Higher Education, which is geared toward providing education and work-related experience. As interns, recipients will be completing on-the-job training while attending school full-time at either Lake Superior College or Northwood Technical College, former WITC, in Superior.

This is the first year the Cloquet mill has developed a dedicated program with Cloquet's career and technical education (CTE) program to recruit interns from the graduating class.

Brittany Bonk, talent manager at Sappi North America, said Sappi wants to "develop a pipeline of talent" into the mill. "The reason we developed the partnership with Cloquet High School is, first, they're local, they're in our community in which we operate. But also they have a very strong



Grant Nordin, left, and Caleb Hansen both graduated from Cloquet High School in May and recently started as maintenance interns at the Cloquet Sappi Mill. Thanks to a state grant, the two will go to college for free to train to work in Sappi's maintenance department when they graduate.

CTE program, and they have a relatively diverse student population."

Bonk explained that Sappi introduced employer overviews to high school juniors and seniors this year, followed by aptitude tests for interested students. Students were then offered the opportunity to interview. Ul-

imately, Nordin and Hansen were offered maintenance intern positions at the mill and entry to the pulp and paper industry.

Both young men were pretty thrilled by the opportunity in a recent interview, although still finding their feet a week into their internship.

Hansen said he had planned

to be an electrician until Sappi came in. He said the idea of free or low-cost schooling made a difference in his decision.

Nordin said he's wanted to be a millwright, aka industrial maintenance technician, for a while. "This program's definitely going to help me get there," he said. "A lot of people are driving toward

college or even getting a doctorate, but that's not really where I see myself."

Both interns said they prefer more hands-on work. This summer they will go through mill safety requirements, and job shadow and work with mentors who have experience in their areas of interest. Once they get into their coursework, the mill will tie that into the work they'll be doing there.

Bonk said it's been difficult to find candidates with work experience related to the background they need in the maintenance department. Sappi has hired graduates of both college programs.

The grant funding is specific to the students' educational costs — tuition and fees — not their jobs at the mill. The grant pays up to 75 percent and Sappi will contribute 25 percent of their college costs.

Hansen has been accepted into the industrial controls program at LSC and Nordin will be in the industrial maintenance technician program at Northwood. The manual machinist program at LSC is another approved degree program for the grant.

"Without the grant, we definitely won't be able to provide the same level of funding and support. So that definitely impacted the viability of the program for us," Bonk said.

Bonk said they hope to grow the maintenance intern program in the future.

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Board hires investigator for latest allegations

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Wrenshall school board members voted unanimously Thursday, June 30, to authorize an outside investigation into allegations of misconduct. The special board meeting was brief and very formal, but public, with motions made after advice from John Edison, the district's attorney from the Minneapolis firm Rupp, Anderson, Squires & Waldspurger.

Last week's special meeting was held specifically to authorize the investigation, after a motion to hire investigator Justin Terch was tabled at the June 13 board meeting so board members could further investigate concerns there might be a conflict of interest. Terch, according to the board conversation that night, is a member of the Carlton County Republicans. Board member Cindy Bourn serves as a vice president of that group.

In the end, Terch chose to make the decision for the board, sending a letter explaining that he was withdrawing from consid-

eration. In the letter, the Cloquet resident said that — other than a precinct caucus and one county convention — he has "never attended any other meetings of, or with, the Carlton County Republicans, nor have I donated any money to this group or received any benefit from it."

Nevertheless, Terch said he prefers the unanimous support of a public body that chooses him as an investigator, so he withdrew for that reason and because he had three other pending matters awaiting his attention. He asked that his letter be placed into public record to correct any misunderstanding.

Edison recommended a different investigator, Isaac Kaufmann, of Red Cedar Consulting, LLC. The attorney said Kaufmann had agreed to put a \$10,000 cap on the investigation, as Terch had done. Kaufmann offered a rate of \$160 per hour. The board unanimously approved motions to authorize Kaufmann to proceed with an investigation as recommended by legal counsel, and also to allow board chair

Misty Bergman to sign an engagement letter with the \$10,000 cap as approved by legal counsel, without holding another board meeting.

When members asked about seeing the contract, Edison said he could send out the written letter, but he stressed that board members could not discuss the letter outside of a public meeting.

Investigation

Earlier in June, the board had two closed meetings to discuss complaints about two employees. Board chairwoman Misty Bergman later said the district employees involved in complaints against them were superintendent Kim Belcastro and Jamie Hopp,

who is the information technology director for the district.

There is a report, obtained by the Pine Knot News from the Carlton County Sheriff's Office, about a call made to that office by Belcastro regarding a threat made by Hopp. Belcastro told the deputy who responded that she was filing the report to have it on record only. There is no active law enforcement investigation. No other allegations have been made public.

The report states that Hopp made a statement to another district employee in the staff lounge and it was relayed to Belcastro by a third party. The report states that Hopp said "If I

could f***ing kill someone it would be the f***ing superintendent."

The report noted that it wasn't a direct threat and there were no signs that Hopp planned to carry out the threat. Belcastro reported that she has "been having issues with Jamie at work for some time," the report said. It said the threat was being investigated internally.

During Thursday's meeting, Edison recommended the investigation include the employee complaints and a new complaint.

"We've discussed some of the allegations extensively in the closed session that took place earlier this month," Edison said. "Since that time, there was

another written complaint that the board is aware of, that we have not discussed in closed session."

When board member Nicole Krisak said she was unaware of another written complaint, Edison said she was the one who submitted it. "Oh, I thought something else must be going on," she said.

Wrenshall resident Tony Sheda asked after the board voted if the new investigator was cheaper.

Krisak responded that his rates are \$40 less per hour than the first proposed investigator.

The board meets at 6 p.m. Monday for its regular July meeting. It's at the Holyoke Town Hall.

Strawberries, honeyberries and raspberries are in season,
and in the coming weeks so will blueberries.

From pies to muffins, summer berries mean plenty of delicious,
fresh dishes. We want to hear about your favorites.

Send us your berry best berry recipes: News@PineKnotNews.com

INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



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WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Union fires back at board on comments

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After two recent bulk mailings sent out to Wrenshall school district residents suggested that complaints about school board member comments in the past 13 months were unfounded, a union group representing district employees delivered the goods on Monday.

More than 70 people attended

Monday's meeting in Holyoke, where union members read a lengthy statement. In total, there were 24 speakers in a public forum that lasted 90 minutes inside the township hall.

Several Minnesota Education-Wrenshall union members responded to and corrected a spate of complaints outlined in a bulk letter sent by resident Tony Sheda.

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More than 70 people were packed into the town hall in Holyoke for the Wrenshall school board meeting Monday. In the public forum, 24 people spoke about the continuing contentiousness in the district when it comes to the school board. Mike Creger / Pine Knot News



Tony Fish (foreground) dances during grand entry Saturday at the Fond du Lac veterans' powwow, a three-day event held for the first time since 2019 this past weekend at the Mash ka wisen powwow grounds in Sawyer. Franny Slater / Pine Knot News

'One of the most beautiful sights'

Veterans powwow returns

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The weather was perfect Saturday for the Fond du Lac veterans' powwow —

held for the first time in three years after a pandemic hiatus.

First into the circle Saturday were the Eagle flags, each one carried by a veteran, who was named by the master of ceremonies. The eagle flags were followed by the Fond du Lac Honor Guards with a row of cloth flags, includ-

ing the FDL reservation flag, a Purple Heart flag, flags from each branch of the Armed Services and a POW flag, flags from other reservations and more. After the flag bearers came the storytellers, men's and women's traditional dancers in regalia, jingle dress dancers, shawl and youth dancers to the drumbeat

and singing of the Cedar Creek drum group, host drum for the powwow.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you're witnessing one of the most beautiful sights in Indian Country," said first time powwow emcee Chi Ma'iingan (aka Herb Fineday), as the host drum group Cedar Creek kicked off the grand entry Sat-

urday afternoon. As each dancer entered the circular dance ring, they were given a pinch of tobacco, to help them remember "the ones who came before, who danced, who taught them to dance," Chi Ma'iingan reminded the crowd.

The mood was festive.

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FARM L O L A

PICK YOUR OWN Berries

Honeyberry picking starts NOW!

Blueberries coming!

798 Cemetery Road, Wrenshall

Call the Berry Hotline at **(218) 400-4950** or sign up for text updates at www.FarmLola.com

Wrenshall ...

Continued from Page 1

The focus eventually was on the portion of the letter that asked for proof of board members making “racist or homophobic” comments in the past.

Another bulk mailing, ostensibly sent by board members Cindy Bourn, Jack Eudy and Deb Washenesky (see accompanying story) also challenged the veracity of the claims about statements made by board members. “If these speakers were serious about these accusations, they would take proper steps rather than making vague statements.”

There was nothing vague about what union members presented Monday. It recited four incidents from four board members to illustrate their claims.

Proof

Here is the portion of the statement that talks about what board members have said in the past. (Editor’s note: The full statement can be read online at pineknotnews.com.)

“The letter challenged ‘those who said such hateful stuff to provide proof: Who, What, Where, When?’ We will share some recordings and examples of comments from board members that are racist, homophobic, inappropriate and unprofessional. We will not provide the who in this public forum (but we do have that documented). We have only included comments made in front of groups, as those made in conversation or out in the community were not always witnessed by others. All of these examples were witnessed by at least three people, if not more.

“During the principal interviews on May 13, 2021, Michelle Blanchard introduced herself and gave many reasons, including the experience and diversity she would bring to the school that would make her the right person for the job. After the interviews, when the board and hiring committee were discussing candidates, one of the board members said in reference to that answer by Mrs. Blanchard, ‘how Michelle introduced herself? African-American woman. She’s a woman.’ This statement was then followed by a long discussion about not seeing color, where another board member stated that she thinks Michelle said what she said because she is proud of herself and went on to say ‘because she is so light colored.’ These are racist statements. This recording of this meeting was put up on the school website but was removed the next day.

“At the June 16, 2021 Committee of the Whole meeting, the Gay Straight

Alliance Club was discussed. During the discussion, a board member stated, ‘I’ll never forget what a teacher told me one time when I was in school. Stuck with me my whole life. He told me all boys before puberty are homosexuals. That’s why they spend so much time in the showers.’ The same board member also stated that they support the club, but then asked the members of the club to not be flamboyant like those famous people and ‘go around wearing dog collars.’ The LGBTQ+ community was also referred to as ‘you people’ several times throughout the meeting.

“At the August 11 Committee of the Whole meeting the board discussed using abatement bonds to redo the parking lot. A board member asked, ‘What if they dig up bones?’ to which another board member replied, ‘I have a plan for that. Fence it off and bring in all the dogs from the dog pound. There won’t be any bones left.’ This comment was in reference to the excavation in Fond Du Lac.

“It was at the August 31 Special Board Meeting regarding the mask mandate when a board member repeatedly disrespected and mocked a parent. When concerns were brought up during this meeting regarding students and family members with pre-existing conditions, the same board member said that Covid is meant to take out the weak but the strong will survive.

“Taken individually, you may think that some of these comments aren’t that bad or were taken out of context. But we can’t take them individually when it keeps happening again and again. It is not just one board member making these comments. These comments came from four different board members on several different occasions. We can’t even imagine being a member of one of these marginalized groups and hearing a representative of our school dehumanize us in this way.”

There was no response from school board members, who cited open forum policy at the beginning of the meeting that people get to speak for four minutes with no comment from the board. Despite that admonition, board members did respond to comments made by other speakers during the forum.

Other comments

Those comments were mostly supportive of the board getting past the divisiveness in the community about its actions. As in past forums, board members were urged to do a better job of communicating and reminded that they serve the public but especially the students in the district. Before the meeting,

Board members’ letter questioned

Mike Creger

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A question was raised at the Wrenshall school board’s public forum Monday about where a bulk mailing came from. Was it through a board discussion or the opinion of merely the three people who were represented at the end of the letter?

One signee, board vice-chairwoman Cindy Bourn, interrupted the speaker and said the mailing was a “campaign letter.” When asked how a reader would know, Bourn said it was “implied.”

In response to an inquiry from the Pine Knot News, chairwoman Bergman said the letter was political and had nothing to do with the board as a whole body. “It was stated in the letter that was sent out that campaign season started early because of the Unite Wrenshall group,” she said Tuesday. “It was not a board letter nor discussed.”

Under state statute, campaign literature must explicitly include the name and address of the person disseminating the political material. The letter, titled, “A Response to Unite Wrenshall Accusation,” has no such information and did not indicate that it was a “campaign letter,” as Bourn said.

Statute says failing to properly label campaign material is a misdemeanor, and those involved could have their candidacy vacated if found guilty in district court.

The letter implied that the “we” speaking in it were Bourn, Jack Eudy and Deb Washenesky. All three are expected to be on the school board ballot in November; however, filings have yet to open for local school board positions.

The letter itself refers to “the Unite Wrenshall crowd” and “dark divisiveness” over comments made by speakers at the public forum at the June regular meeting, which included references to past statements from board members the speakers considered “racist and homophobic.”

The letter called the public com-

Tony Sheda recited the gist of the bulk letter he sent out, greeting those in attendance before the 6 p.m. meeting started in Holyoke.

A large portion of Sheda’s commentary was devoted to perceived slights of board members and the school district in the pages of the Pine Knot and Pine Journal. One of the first items board chairwoman Cindy Bourn talked about was in the consent agenda and the billings for May. She questioned the use of the Pine Knot as the district’s legal newspaper, which the board approved in January.

There was a decision early on to move the public forum to the top of the meeting and to add to the agenda a discussion about how the forum should be conducted. The rules in place meant that 24 people who signed up could speak, taking up 90 minutes.

The comments started out in support of the board and the urging for people

to be “respectful to each other.”

Mary Carlson said she lives outside the district but chooses to have her children attend Wrenshall schools. She said she has a 4-year-old who is taught what those on both sides in the current atmosphere should practice: “Active listening,” she said. “We need to start listening.”

Union members then spoke, saying they have been “silent for too long,” when it comes to the comments from the board members.

Union president Denise North said providing the actual words used by board members did not come lightly.

“We believe in redemption,” she said. “We are not throwing the board out.” She and others just want them to “do better.” North said the letters sent to residents was classic “gaslighting,” deflecting blame, and board members and Sheda need to “just stop.”

What the statute says

Here is the state statute regarding unmarked campaign materials: 211B.04 CAMPAIGN MATERIAL MUST INCLUDE DISCLAIMER. Subdivision 1. Campaign material.

(a) A person who participates in the preparation or dissemination of campaign material that does not prominently include the name and address of the person or committee causing the material to be prepared or disseminated in a disclaimer substantially in the form provided in paragraph (b) or (c) is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(b) Except in cases covered by paragraph (c), the required form of disclaimer is: “Prepared and paid for by the XXX committee, address” for material prepared and paid for by a principal campaign committee, or “Prepared and paid for by the XXX committee, address” for material prepared and paid for by a person or committee other than a principal campaign committee.

ments vague and asked those who have talked about them to bring specifics to board chairwoman Misty Bergman.

The letter refers to a comment made on the Unite Wrenshall Facebook page echoing the same concerns about alleged board member statements. The letter stated the group was “parroting that talking point,” but did not mention who made the comment or when it was made on a platform that is open to anyone who joins online.

On Monday, the statements made by board members in the past 13 months were read by the union members representing district employees, Education Minnesota Wrenshall. They also played recordings of some of the comments.

That recitation — a response to the mass mailing of letters from the three board members and a separate letter by resident Tony Sheda — left no doubt about the comments made by board members.

“Taken individually, you may think that some of these comments aren’t that bad or were taken out of context,” the Education Minnesota Wrenshall statement that was read Monday said. “But we can’t take them individually when it keeps happening again and again. It is not just one board member making these comments. These comments came from four different board members on several different occasions. We can’t even imagine being

a member of one of these marginalized groups and hearing a representative of our school dehumanize us in this way.

“We are not standing up because we are bitter about not getting what we wanted, as the letter insinuates. We are standing up because these statements, beliefs, and accusations hurt our students, school and community. We are standing up because it is the right thing to do. We are standing up because if we don’t, nothing will change.”

The full statement, including the board comments in question, can be found at www.pineknotnews.com.

Another portion of the board members’ letter that seemed to irk those who spoke about it Monday was near the end. It stated: “If I were a parent observing all the contentions over our school, I would think twice about enrolling my students. Unite Wrenshall should think hard about their campaign strategy. They are the ones hurting the school.”

Lisa Clarke, who began the Unite Wrenshall Facebook page in 2016 during a campaign for school referendum, said she took the page down recently because of how people were misconstruing its purpose. She said the only item posted in recent months about the school board was a call for people to run for any seats open this fall. It listed the eligibility requirements to run and provided links to the Minnesota School Boards Association website.

Teacher Ted Conover is the advisor for the Genders and Sexualities Alliance and said despite the board comments last year and its not allowing a seminar on the group’s issues, things have changed inside the school. He said he’s proud as a teacher in Wrenshall, where in the classroom you find an “accepting and loving” space.

He urged the crowd to read the words of Sage Fernquist, the Class of 2022 valedictorian who wrote a commentary that appeared in the Pine Knot June 24.

“The first step toward empathy is to inquire with the intent to understand,” Fernquist wrote and Conover repeated on Monday.

The rest of the speakers went back and forth. Some urged board support and felt the continuing discord needed to stop on the board side and the public. Others talked about their love for the school and the fear they have about perceptions of the district.

Chairwoman Misty Bergman said a thank-you after the comments and “we can become better for this.”

Superintendent Kim Belcastro said she is reminded every day about why she stays on in the district. “I hope we can bring things together,” she said. Referring to pressing district issues outside of the rancor, she said it all can be worked on “when we get done with all this crap” and “do what’s best for students.”

In other matters

There was a regular meeting to get to, in what became a more-than-four-hour meeting in Holyoke. Items discussed by the board included:

- Belcastro said enrollment is a concern, with 342 confirmed students right now. Last year, the school hovered near the 370 mark.

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INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



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Emergency services under fire



A Cloquet Area Fire District ambulance waits in the background while worried parents wait to pick up their children after a bomb scare in Esko in March. Ambulance calls and costs are on the rise, which often leaves taxpayers making up the difference as reimbursements continue to fall far short of paying the bills, especially in rural areas where the population is more spread out. *Pine Knot file photo*

Ambulance services face multiple challenges

Jana Peterson
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On March 17, witnesses estimated nearly two dozen squad cars, ambulances and firetrucks from multiple jurisdictions responded to the school campus in the heart of Esko. Someone — in Africa, it later turned out — had called in a bomb threat. There was no bomb, but that didn't change the fact that emergency responders and law enforcement waited for hours before the scene was cleared.

At least two ambulances and staff responded from the Cloquet Area Fire District (CAFD). Nobody was billed for those services;

it's just part of why communities have emergency services: to be prepared for whatever may happen. Or not.

But the bomb threat helps illustrate an issue that is being debated locally and across the country: how to pay for emergency medical services. Not just for the ambulance that arrives on the doorstep when you call 911, but for the costs of maintaining that service: the staff, equipment, training and even the times they aren't busy responding to calls.

Ambulance costs became a hot button issue locally last fall, when the CAFD board — which has taxing authority granted by

the state — voted to raise the tax rates paid for ambulance services dramatically.

Residents in Thomson Township, in particular, balked when they opened their proposed tax bills and found the ambulance portion was nearly four times the previous rate.

Township officials threatened to start their own ambulance service or get services elsewhere: both actions that would require approval of a state board.

Eventually, after several meetings packed with irate township residents, the CAFD board voted to roll back its increase and promised to carefully study costs and revenues on both the fire and ambulance sides of

the equation.

Since then the board hired a consultant to do exactly that. The board adopted the resulting 12-page report and recommended methodologies for determining costs at its meeting July 20.

It's complicated

CAFD is a somewhat unique organization in the state of Minnesota. It provides fire protection to 170 square miles and ambulance service to a state-mandated area of more than 250 square miles in Carlton County and southern St. Louis County.

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WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Investigation leaves tech dilemma

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An investigation into employee misconduct figures to end soon, but not before disrupting the start of the school year within the Wrenshall School

District.

At a time when Chromebooks and computers need to come online for teachers and roughly 350 students, the district's information technology director is on administrative leave.

Jaime Hopp is under

investigation for profanely alluding to "killing" the superintendent in the staff lounge in June. Another district employee overheard the threat, which superintendent Kim Belcastro later reported to Carlton County authorities.

School board and district officials Wednesday, July 27 talked briefly about interim technology solutions, but moved any votes to begin next week.

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Carlton Daze is here

Pine Knot News

When Carlton throws a party, expect big things. And there's nothing bigger than the annual Carlton Daze celebration, which kicks off Friday and runs through Sunday, July 29-31.

Carlton Daze offers something for everyone: a pretty big small-town parade, loads of live music, all kinds of food, a classic car show, sales galore and lots of tournaments, from softball and volleyball, to bean bags, poker and golf. There are gun raffles and meat raffles, community church services, fun at the fire department and a bubble dance party at the bike shelter. Ancillary events such as the Paddlemania races at Jay Cooke Park and the Minnesota Voyageur ultramarathon on Saturday simply add to the fun.

"It's an opportunity for neighbors and the larger community to celebrate: who we are, what we do, where we come from and to reunite with old and new friends," said Chamber president Shanna Wolf. "Everyone comes together to make it happen."

She means that literally. No one group or person really "does" Carlton Daze.

"Everybody kind of knows it happens the last full weekend of July every year, so they all do their part," she said, adding that the Chamber helps promote the event and organizes the 5K race and parade.

Speaking of the parade, longtime community volunteer Mike Orłowski will be the grand marshal in Sunday's parade. Wolf said it was an easy choice. "We look for people that we think have the community's best interest at heart," Wolf said. "Mike is everywhere, and has so many connections."

Find the full schedule of events on Pages 12-13.

JULY
29-31
2022

CARLTON DAZE

FUN FOR ALL AGES

Carlton Area Chamber of Commerce

• Parade • Live Music
• Car Show • And Much More

Family friendly
chip timed
5K Run/Walk
Friday, July 29 @ 7 PM
All ages and abilities welcome

T-shirts Guaranteed

Carlton Daze Event Schedule, 5K and Parade registration information at: www.CarltonChamber.com/Carlton-Daze

AREA EVENTS

FRIDAY, JULY 29

Fidgety Fairy Tales – The Mental Health Musicals presents a free show, “The Three Little Pigs,” a musical puppet show about anxiety, at 2 p.m. at the County Seat Theater, Encore Performing Arts Center and Gallery, 2035 Highway 33 South (on frontage road), Cloquet, 878-0071.

SATURDAY, JULY 30

Carlton County farmers market 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays through Oct. 21 in front of Premiere Theatres in Cloquet.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2

Antique appraisals with Steve Wesely of Cresent Auctioneering, 7 p.m., Fires of 1918 Museum, Moose Lake. Suggested donation \$3 per person, 2-item limit, please. No charge for MLAHS members. 218-485-4159, 485-4234

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3

Nutrition assistance program for seniors (NAPS) food distribution 9:30-10:45 a.m. the first Wednesday of the month at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Cloquet.

Wright Seniors meet at 1 p.m. Wednesdays at the senior building.

Senior dance at the Cloquet VFW 1-4 p.m. with

music by the Chmielewski Funtime Band. Potluck, \$8 cover. 218-210-7793

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4

Snake, Rattle & Roll 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. at the Cloquet Public Library. 879-1531

Cloquet Alzheimer's and memory loss caregivers support group meets 12-1:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at Arby's. All welcome. 651-472-2839

Carlton County farmers market 4 to 6 p.m. Tues-

days through mid-October in McFarland Park, Highway 210 and Grand Avenue.

The Cromwell Area Community Club meets 5-6:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Cromwell

Pavilion. cacclubinfo@gmail.com

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5

Carlton VFW Post 2962 hosts a meat raffle 6 p.m. Fridays, and bingo 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays. 218-384-3794

Wrenshall school

Continued from page 1

“Things are really picking up right now,” Belcastro said of the ramp-up to the school year, adding later: “What’s been unfortunate is how long the situation has taken, I think we all know that.”

Meanwhile, Isaac Kaufmann, of Edina-based Red Cedar Consulting, spent Tuesday and Wednesday interviewing subjects involved in the investigation.

“I was with Mr. Kaufman for three hours today,” Belcastro told the board.

Board chair Misty Bergman updated the board on progress.

“We were hoping he would be able to have his results to us by Aug. 15, but that was just an estimate so we’ll see what happens,” Bergman said. “He is here and it is underway.”

In the interim, one teacher on special assignment outside the classroom is being asked to help with technology. Deb Fenlason, who is scheduled to work with students K-12 who are below grade level, was unable to report to the board Wednesday.

The main person proposed as an interim solution, T.J. Smith, was also not available at the last minute for what had been a specially called meeting.

Smith is technology director for Cloquet Public Schools, but his prospect of a short-term contract with

Wrenshall may have hit a roadblock.

“I’m kind of having a little bit of a problem with him, T.J. Smith, because I think it’s kind of a conflict of interest if we’re hiring him,” board member Jack Eudy said, seeming to reference putting another person under contract for a job that’s already filled.

Belcastro said she’d speak with the school district attorney about implications of a short-term contract with an outsider. Smith has worked with the district in the recent past, “on a very part-time basis to support us where needed,” Belcastro said.

The board expects to address interim solutions again at its committee of the whole meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 3, at the school.

Belcastro referred to the availability of the teacher, Fenlason, during what was a short meeting, with no actions taken.

“She’s hoping to be in the building on Monday to be able to do some of this prep work for the start of the school year in the interim here,” Belcastro said. “While we’re waiting on the technology director to be back on site working.”

Hopp is not under investigation with the Carlton County Sheriff’s Office. The district’s investigation could also include at least one other unknown complaint, according to the school district’s attorney, John Edison, last month.

That complaint was submitted by board member Nicole Krisak.



DFL



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10 a.m. to Noon

Saturday, July 30

Soo Line Event Center, Moose Lake

Coffee with the Candidates who are your DFL team

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Eric Olson for House 11B

and

John Peura for Senate District 11



**With special guest:
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Wednesday, August 3 @ 12:10 PM vs Tigers
Thursday, August 4 @ 6:40 PM vs Blue Jays

Pre-game is 40 minutes prior to the first pitch

INSIDE

This week in Carlton County's only independent, locally owned newspaper.



Treatment center opens **Page 3**



Esko takes third at state **Page 11**



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ESKO ROLLS THROUGH FUN DAYS



Esko hockey kids skate through Saturday's Esko Fun Days parade on rollerblades. The community celebrated 102 years of Esko schools last week, culminating with Saturday's parade and a street dance that evening, along with assorted reunion gatherings Friday and Saturday. *Dave Harwig / Pine Knot News*

FIND MORE FUN DAYS PHOTOS ON PAGE 7

MORE SUMMER FUN HEADED OUR WAY

Pine Knot News

With Ma & Pa Kettle Days on Saturday and the Carlton County Fair starting next week, the summer celebrations are far from over.

But it is beginning to wane a bit after a mad flurry of festivals, so seize the moment.

Head to Kettle River tomorrow for a taste of small town togetherness, on display as local organizations and businesses set up down main drag in a sort of "standstill parade meets farmers market" event from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. Expect everything from shopping to politicians to resources. The pie social starts at noon, bingo starts at 1 p.m. There's mini golf and cornhole and music into the night.

Next we turn our attention to the county fair, starting Thursday. One of the latest county fairs in the state, Carlton County does it right. The horse races are legendary, and the car races are nuts. And who doesn't love checking out all the 4-H animals and entries for everything from photography to flower arranging while munching on something unhealthy? Plus, it's practically the only time the carnival comes to our county, so check out the schedule for wristband days, parents and grandparents.

Check out page 14 for more on Ma & Pa Kettle Days and the Carlton County Fair, including grandstand and midway highlights, along with a more detailed schedule of the first two days of the fair.

While you're perusing the paper, enjoy all the photographs of last week-end's merrymaking, and check out our website to find even more.

WRENSHALL SCHOOLS

Teacher confronts board behavior



Chloe Swanson

Brady Slater
news@PineKnotNews.com

Another tumultuous week within the Wrenshall School District saw a school board member formally apologizing to one group of people, while offending another, and teachers and administrators confronting the board about the impact of its behavior.

"As a member of the LGBTQ+ community and co-advisor of our (gender-sexualities alliance) club, I can no longer remain quiet as our leadership ignores human and students' rights," said the school's media specialist Chloe Swanson during the board meeting Monday, Aug. 8.

Her 3-minute appeal was met with a round of applause from a room filled with mostly teachers.

Swanson was reacting to comments made by Jack Eudy during a committee of the whole meeting Aug. 3. She also explained she was told last school year by a supervisor to suppress a children's book about non-traditional families, "And Tango Makes Three," until complaints from one family blew over.

"Instead of creating a robust and exciting library media program, I was holding hands of LGBTQ+ students as they cried, contemplating suicide, because of actions of leadership and bullying of their peers," Swanson added. "I could only say, 'I'm sorry,

this is so unfair.'"

Swanson's appeal came after school board member Jack Eudy ended the Aug. 3 committee of the whole meeting by saying young students don't need to be taught about homosexuality.

"They need to be kids," Eudy said. "They don't need to know about all this transgender, all this other stuff. Gay, whatever. It's not homophobic. It's common sense. They've got a right to be kids."

Then Monday, Aug. 8, Eudy apologized to the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa for remarks he made about

Continued on page 20

WOOD CITY WORSHIP FESTIVAL

Veterans Memorial Park, Cloquet
Saturday, August 13 • 10 AM - 10 PM
FREE AND OPEN TO ALL AGES.

There will be bounce houses for the kids, food vendors, music all day and a great atmosphere of prayer and worship.

Presented by Kingdom Builders Ministries of Cloquet.
More information is available on Facebook at Wood City Worship



Featuring Cory Asbury



Wrenshall schools

Continued from page 1

using dogs to dispose of Native American burial remains in the event any were found during the school's parking lot project.

"I ask for forgiveness for my ignorance and failure to educate myself on your ways and beliefs," Eudy said, reading from a copy of a letter he'd sent to the Band. "I'm ashamed I brought this on the people in our school district."

Eudy's vacillation between insult and apology came as superintendent Kim Belcastro and others tried to emphasize positive developments, including nearly completed facility improvements.

Belcastro said she was intent on "resetting" and "refocusing" on the crest of a new school year.

"We want to be together," she said. "We don't want to be separate."

Belcastro noted Aug. 3 that enrollment projected to 342 students in 2022-23, with the district having recently lost at least two families fed up with board politics.

"We are dealing with some upset parents that have indicated they don't like how things have been going at the board level dealing with issues," Belcastro said. "That's what

I have been told."

Eudy bristled at the notion, saying he was tired of himself and the board being blamed, and that he's met with families who are concerned about certain books being taught.

"The board does have a say on curriculum and what's being read," Eudy said. "If we don't take a stand we're losing. ... It's not just the board that needs to do better. It's the whole community. It's the teachers, the superintendent, the principal. It's all of us."

Another teacher, Joel Swanson, said he was entering his 29th year at the school, and believed parents and teachers' collective love for students was leading to misplaced fear and targeting.

"If you have any fears about what's happening in our school and classrooms, please talk directly to your child's teachers," Joel Swanson said. "Trust we will do our best to find common ground for the benefit of all."

Chloe Swanson said her mother and teaching peers talked her out of leaving the district, reminding her of the values that exist within the school community.

"They deserve fierce advocates and strong role models," Chloe Swanson said of students, before concluding by noting it wasn't her role to educate

adults.

"It's my job to prepare students with critical thinking, problem solving and empathy building skills," she said. "It's not my job to teach adults the following: that LGBTQ+ people exist."

No cell phones

On Monday, the Wrenshall School Board unanimously adopted a ban on cellular phone use during the school day.

Dubbed "Away for the Day," students will have to turn off their phones and leave phones in their lockers prior to the day's first bell.

Students won't be allowed to turn phones back on until the school day is completed. Progressive discipline includes a three-strikes policy that ends with a student not being able to bring their phone to school for a quarter.

"It's problems galore," principal Michelle Blanchard said of cell phones. "I haven't seen one positive thing with phones, so that's why we're going with this policy."

Blanchard described the phones as a distraction, with students creating TikTok videos, texting excessively, taking others' photos without permission, and even bullying. She found one Instagram account that featured pictures of Wrenshall students sleeping in class.

"There's less engagement

in class, because they're on their phones," Blanchard said.

Her appeal was well-received by board members.

Belcastro noted that all students now have Chromebooks, so they'll have access to the internet for class work throughout the school day.

The Pine Knot asked Blanchard about emergencies. It's been widely reported students are the ones often calling 911 during tragedies such as school violence.

"Let's hope and pray that it doesn't happen, but every classroom has a phone in it," the principal said. "And schools have safety proto-

cols they follow. We would just do our best following the safety plan we have in place."

Teachers will also continue to have their cell

phones on them, the principal added.

Editor's note: Find a video of Chloe Swanson's speech on our Facebook page.

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Jerrid (born and raised Minnesotan)

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To hear more from Jerrid about our sustainability efforts, watch the video at enbridge.com/jerrid.



KNOT NOTES

Fire destroys pole building

A pole building burned in Skelton Township, outside Barnum, on Saturday, Aug. 13.

A passerby reported the fire on the 4400 block of County Road 6 at 11:46 p.m.

Responding emergency personnel found nobody injured, but a pole building that was a total loss along with its contents, a Carlton County Sheriff's Office news release said.

Barnum, Moose Lake and Kettle River fire departments responded to the fire, along with sheriff's deputies and Essentia Health-Moose Lake paramedics.

Deputies learned the homeowner had been using a wood stove in the pole building earlier in the evening, but the cause of the fire remained under investigation by the State Fire Marshal.

Hwy 33 study open for comments

A study of the Minnesota Highway 33 corridor through Cloquet is being conducted to help create a transportation plan in the area, said a Minnesota Department of Transportation news release this week.

The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and MnDOT are studying the state highway, in part, by gaining public feedback through a virtual open house available through Sept. 30.

"The goal of the transportation plan is to look at pedestrian and bicycle safety along Highway 33 in Cloquet and develop a long-range plan and vision for potential system improvements throughout Cloquet," MnDOT said.

Potential improvements could include pedestrian, bicycle and aesthetic enhancements. "Community engagement is a key factor in the development and success of this plan," MnDOT said.

The virtual open house is available to view at any time and includes information on project goals, project timeline, and a look at existing conditions.

The link to the community survey can be found at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a23a38d31c4944d4a134c4fef0f286be>.

NEWS

GLOBAL VISITORS ENJOY A TASTE OF OJIBWE CULTURE



Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College welcomed Indigenous-serving educators from across the world over the past week, hosting the annual gathering of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium.

Guests and local residents danced together at a drum and dance exhibition Saturday, and the fun continued Monday with canoe races and Baaga'adowewin (traditional stick lacrosse) on Tuesday. In addition to bringing people together, the free events helped illustrate the significance of the Fond du Lac Reservation and Ojibwe culture.

FDLTCC has been a member of the consortium — which focuses primarily on Indigenous education and the educational rights of Indigenous people — since 2017.



Photos by Taylor Warnes / FDLTCC



WRENSHALL

Wrenshall investigation to wrap Aug. 24

Brady Slater
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The Wrenshall school board will convene for a special meeting Aug. 24 to hear results of an investigation into possible misconduct by the school's information technology director.

The board will gather at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday at the school to learn what Edina-based Red Cedar Consulting found out during days of interviews related to a comment made by technology director Jaime Hopp.

Hopp is alleged to have profanely alluded to "killing" the district superintendent while in the staff lounge in June. Another district employee overheard the threat, which superintendent Kim Belcastro later reported to Carlton County authorities.

Hopp is not under criminal investigation, but has been on administra-

tive leave since earlier this summer.

It's been a costly endeavor for the district. The board agreed to a \$10,000 cap on the investigation, and has had to approve additional spending related to addressing technology needs on the crest of a new school year.

Ongoing facility upgrades have also created an increased need for on-site technical expertise throughout construction.

Board member Jack Eudy expressed disgust with the process at the Aug. 3 committee of the whole meeting, calling for Hopp to be reinstated by a board vote.

"We need to get (her) back in the school, because all of this added stuff is costing us more money," Eudy said. "It just doesn't make sense to keep her out."

Board chair Misty Bergman said the board didn't have the authority to do

anything further while the investigation was unfolding. The board approved the investigation June 30. Since then, other board members have lamented how long things have taken.

"I'm losing patience with this," Eudy said Aug. 3. "I've never been so disgusted."

In lieu of having its own technology director available, the district is relying on one of its teachers as well as outside help, including T.J. Smith, a technological consultant from Cloquet who charges \$60 per hour, and Tech Check, a firm from Sartell, Minnesota, with which the district contracts to fill gaps left by its limitations.

Board member Ben Johnson wondered Aug. 3 if Smith's fees were too much.

"Do you foresee any changes in your rates?" Johnson asked Smith, who attended the meeting via

videoconferencing.

Smith explained his rates, and that he'd previously been technology director within the Wrenshall district. He gave examples of how he'd been able to spare the district costlier repairs and solutions in the past.

"I'm very familiar with systems in place at Wrenshall, and in my full-time job I'm technology director for Cloquet Public Schools," Smith said. "This is what I do full-time, and I've got 20-plus years of experience I bring into what I do. I'm just here to help out until things can get a little more decided."

District officials also described paying Tech Check \$75,000 this year, a figure they said was double the normal annual outlay because of work associated with building renovations.

"Tech Check is technical support that Jaime consults with a lot, and also they do things to support her with

things she's not able to do," Belcastro said during a special meeting July 27.

"We use them a fair amount, but really used them a lot when we were under construction," Belcastro added.

Bergman stressed patience, and said that John Edison, the district's attorney, recommended staying the course by relying on outside contractors.

In addition to setting up Chromebook computers used by every student, the school requires its internet, desktop computer network and phone system to be maintained by technology services.

"We're all kind of concerned about our technology needs getting met before school starts," Bergman said Aug. 8. "We should be able to get some answers from the investigation if we hang in there for another two weeks."