

Rory roars while Tiger struggles ⁵



Judge Lund retiring after 21 years ¹¹

Man arrested after pounds of meth found ²

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2 lawsuits against Mayo Clinic may be just the start

Employees were fired over COVID vaccine requirements

BY JEFF KIGER
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — Two former Mayo Clinic employees filed lawsuits this week claiming they were unfairly fired for refusing COVID-19 vaccines. They may be the first of a coming wave of wrongful termination suits.

Minneapolis attorney Gregory Erickson, who represents Shelly Kiel of Owatonna and Sherry Ihde of Zumbro Falls, said these two cases are just the first of more than 100 similar ones that he is filing against Mayo Clinic.

He also expects to file similar suits against Olmsted Medical Center for former employees that he is representing.

"About 80 to 100 of the cases against Mayo Clinic will be for people who live in Rochester," said Erickson on Wednesday evening. "A lot more cases will be filed next week."

He said he also represents fired Mayo Clinic employees in Wisconsin, Florida and Arizona.

Mayo Clinic issued a statement about the lawsuits.

"Mayo Clinic stands firmly behind the evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 vaccines to help protect the health and safety of our patients, workforce, visitors and communities. The Mayo Clinic COVID-19 vaccination program remains in effect," wrote Mayo Clinic officials. "Mayo Clinic will defend its vaccine program implementation and disputes many of the factual allegations in the lawsuit."

The statement added, "Mayo Clinic recognizes that some employees have deeply held religious beliefs that led them to seek exemption from COVID-19 vaccination. In compliance with established laws, Mayo offered its employees the option to request a religious accommodation. The majority of religious exemption requests were granted."

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Traci Westcott / Post Bulletin

Delegates react to the vote putting Jensen in the lead during the Minnesota State Republican Convention on Saturday at Mayo Civic Center in Rochester, Minnesota. Both the DFL and GOP conventions came to Rochester in 2022 along with many visitors to the city.

Business boost

Conventions return, local economy sees growth

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER
Rochester's economy is receiving a sizable jolt of economic stimulus as the pace of convention business returns to levels not seen since the COVID pandemic started in March 2020.

Within a week, Mayo Civic Center will have served as host to GOP and DFL state conventions, bringing thousands of attendees and their dollars to the area. The GOP held its two-day convention last weekend, and the DFL will kick off its three-day event on Friday.

Experience Rochester, the city's visitor and convention bureau, estimates the combined conventions will result in \$2.3 million in direct spending on lodging,

dining, gas and other services. Officials say the two conventions will draw 3,500 people and result in the booking of 1,700 room nights at hotels.

But the political conventions haven't delivered the biggest economic punch so far this year.

That distinction goes to twin United Hardware conferences hosted by the Civic Center. The two events — one held in January and other planned for June — are projected to bring in 4,000 people, result in 2,200 room nights in hotels and lead to \$3.1 million in economic stimulus.

"It took every square inch of the Mayo Civic Center," said Joe Ward, president of Experience Rochester about the hardware event.

It's been more than a decade since the city hosted

both political conventions, and while both have been delivering the goods in terms of economic stimulus, there is still room for improvement, officials and hotel general managers say.

"To get both conventions is absolutely fantastic, particularly coming off the pandemic and the challenges that businesses have been facing," Ward said. "It's not going to cure everybody's year, but it's a nice little shot in the arm."

Ward said hotel occupancy in Rochester fell to 15% in the depths of the pandemic. Last year saw a slow but gradual improvement. This year, with convention business picking up, revenues in Rochester's hotel sector have reached 90% of pre-pandemic levels in the last four months.

But Ward also noted that four new hotel properties

opened during the pandemic, so occupancies are still far below pre-pandemic levels.

"I think (hotel properties) are still out of their comfort zone," Ward said. "If you talk to an individual property, they still have a lot of room that they'd like to improve."

For Michael Smith, general manager of Hotel Indigo, the uptick in business as result of the return of sporting and events to Rochester has been "such a breath of fresh air. It's tremendous."

He said his 178-room hotel was filled to capacity during the GOP convention, the first since it opened in January 2020, two months before the pandemic forced statewide lockdowns. At times, the hotel's occupancy hovered in the single digits during the worst of the pandemic.

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Minnesota parents concerned on baby formula shortage

BY DANA FERGUSON
Post Bulletin

ST. PAUL — Minnesota parents on Thursday, May 19, told Walz Administration officials about their struggles to find baby formula for their infants amid the national shortage and urged state action to make more formula available.

Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan along with state Department of Health leaders, lawmakers, health care providers and grocery company leaders met for a round table discussion at the Capitol to discuss the scale of the problem and to consider what state leaders and private companies could offer solutions.

"Access to nutrition, that's

the priority and we want to figure out how we can do that," Flanagan said. "We are feeding our babies and there is literally nothing that is more important than that."

The shutdown of a Michigan formula plant due to reported contamination earlier this year left the market with a substantial gap in recent weeks that came to a head after parents reported that infant formula was unavailable in stores or online. Minnesota parents said they'd visited multiple stores to find formula and reached out to friends or family in other states or countries to see if they could spare extra canisters.

This week, the Food and Drug Administration said it would allow the plant to

reopen after it was expected and announced that it would loosen regulations on other formula production plants to get more infant formula into circulation. The Biden Administration on Wednesday also invoked the federal Defense Production Act to get needed supplies to U.S. formula producers and order the Department of Defense to expedite shipments coming from overseas.

And while the moves are expected to bring additional resources to market in about four to six weeks, parents said that wouldn't relieve their concerns about running out before more canisters might become available.

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Dana Ferguson / Post Bulletin

Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan on Thursday met with parents, health care providers, lawmakers and grocery store leaders to discuss the ongoing shortage of baby formula across the country.

Man arrested at impound lot after pounds of meth found

BY EMILY CUTTS
Post Bulletin

WABASHA — A Lake City man is facing felony charges after law enforcement reportedly found nearly 5 pounds of methamphetamine inside his vehicle after it was towed from a county road several days before.

Michael Jerald Mattison, 46, was arrested Tuesday, May 17, 2022, when he went to the Wabasha County Criminal Justice Center seeking the return of his vehicle from the county's impound lot.

Mattison is charged in Wabasha County District Court with felony first-degree aggravated controlled substance crime and first-degree controlled substance crime. He made his first appearance in court on the charges Thursday where Judge Christopher Neisen set conditional bail at \$200,000 and unconditional bail at \$400,000. Mattison's next court appearance is scheduled for June 7.

The 4.96 pounds of suspected meth was found in Mattison's vehicle after a confidential reliable informant told a detective with the Southeast Minnesota Violent Crime Enforcement Team that Mattison had been involved in a single vehicle crash while



Mattison

towing another vehicle and that they heard his vehicle contained a large amount of meth, the criminal

complaint states.

In the days after the crash, Mattison told a Wabasha County Sheriff's deputy that he had swerved to avoid a deer.

After a drug sniffing dog alerted to the potential of drugs in the vehicle, a search was conducted and a large blue bag containing multiple smaller plastic bags were found along with paperwork bearing Mattison's name.

When interviewed by law enforcement, Mattison reportedly admitted that the approximately 5 pounds of meth had been mailed to him from a contact he had in California and that he had paid approximately \$2,500 per pound and was hoping to make about \$500 per pound, according to the criminal complaint.

This is the second time in recent months that law enforcement in Wabasha County have found pounds of meth.

In March, Federico Hernandez-Mozqueda, 39, was charged with three counts of first-degree



Hernandez-Mozqueda

controlled substance crime after Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport Police intercepted a package containing approx-

imately 2.3 pounds of meth addressed to Hernandez-Mozqueda at his Plainview address, according to a news release from the Wabasha County Attorney's Office.

He is currently being held on \$100,000 conditional bail. A hearing is scheduled for June 24.

Wabasha County Sheriff's deputies ultimately recovered more than 1.53 pounds of meth.

"These cases show that methamphetamine is still rampant here in Wabasha," Wabasha Sheriff's Office Capt. Curt Struwe said in a news release. "The people of Wabasha should know that the Sheriff and the County Attorney are dedicated to keeping our citizens safe, and ensuring that those who bring these destructive substances into our county and into our homes are held accountable."

Contact public safety reporter Emily Cutts at ecutts@post-bulletin.com



Contributed / Wabasha County Sheriff's Office

The Wabasha County Sheriff's Office and Wabasha County Attorney's Office allege that these bags contain nearly five pounds of methamphetamine and were confiscated in May from a vehicle belonging to a Lake City man.

Formula

From page 1

Allie Smulka said her 10-month-old daughter Whitney goes through about a can of her formula each week. After a recall, she had to throw out two of three cans that she had and worried about getting more before the last can ran out.

"What do we do in those four to six weeks? That's a very long time," Smulka said. "It's a health crisis. How do we feed these kids?"

State nutrition

program leaders said the state's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) special supplemental nutrition program had opened up additional varieties of formula available and had a list of formula varieties that could be used as a substitute if family members were unable to find their preferred formula for their children.

Dr. Andrea Singh, chair of pediatrics at Park Nicollet, said parents should first look for comparable formula options to try with their babies and if they're

unable to find those options, they should call their health care providers for advice on what options might work for feeding. She urged parents not to turn to do-it-yourself options advised on social media, as they might not be safe for babies.

"We'd much rather you come to us than you go online and figure out what somebody somewhere else was doing," Singh said. "Instead of making a DIY option, call your medical team."

Minnesota Republican Party leaders on

Thursday said state and federal leaders should've stepped in sooner to open up additional supply options for parents.

"Now that the shortage has reached crisis level, Democrats like Gov. Walz are scrambling to clean up this crisis that they ignored for months," Republican Party of Minnesota Executive Director Mike Lonergan said. "Minnesota families need results so they can feed their babies."

Follow Dana Ferguson on Twitter @bydanaferguson, call 651-290-0707 or email ferguson@forumcomm.com.

Economy

From page 1

While reviving convention business has been heartening, every hotel is different. And every business is recovering at a different rate, depending on the hotel and "the business you had on the books," he said.

Still Smith, whose last day as general manager at Indigo Hotel was Wednesday, sounded optimistic about the overall turn of events.

"I feel like the hotels are ramping up," Smith said. "I feel that we're headed in the right direction."

The two political conventions, part of a four-week run at the Civic Center, have been sandwiched between "Just For Kix Nationals"

dance tournaments held earlier this month and the second United Hardware event set for next week. Thrive Women's Conference, a Christian women's event, is set for the fall.

And Rochester convention officials hope the Jehovah's Witnesses, which canceled their worldwide conferences starting in 2020, will return to the Med City next year.

That three-day conference brings close to 20,000 people from the Upper Midwest and delivers \$20 million in economic stimulus to the city from spending on hotels, restaurants and other venues.

"They have recommitted to coming back next July, so that'll be great to see those folks in town again," Ward said.

Mayo

From page 1

These actions follow up ones that Erickson started in 2021 as the debate over vaccines and religious exemptions started to heat up with employee protests.

In late September, he filed a suit against a collection of large providers on behalf of 200 anonymous health care employees. The goal was to block vaccine mandates within hospitals, but U.S. District Court Judge Nancy Brasel declined to take that step.

In 2021, Mayo Clinic instituted a rule that all employees were required to be vaccinated unless exempted for religious or medical reasons or face termination in January. When the deadline arrived, Mayo Clinic said "nearly 99 percent" of its 73,000 employees were vaccinated or had exemptions.

An estimated 700 Mayo Clinic employees were fired for not complying with the rule. Many vowed to sue, setting the stage for the legal actions

this summer.

Each case will be different, though the opposition to being vaccinated will be at the heart of all them.

Shelly Kiel worked as a licensed practical nurse for Mayo Clinic for more than 18 years. In her lawsuit, she claimed that she had natural immunity after having COVID-19 as well as having a religious opposition to the vaccine.

"Plaintiff Kiel requested a religious exemption from the Vaccine Mandate and then a requested a reconsideration, which were both

denied. Plaintiff Kiel is a Christian who believes, based on her interpretation of scripture, that her body is a Temple to the Holy Spirit and it violates her religious beliefs and conscience to take the Covid-19 vaccine," according to her lawsuit.

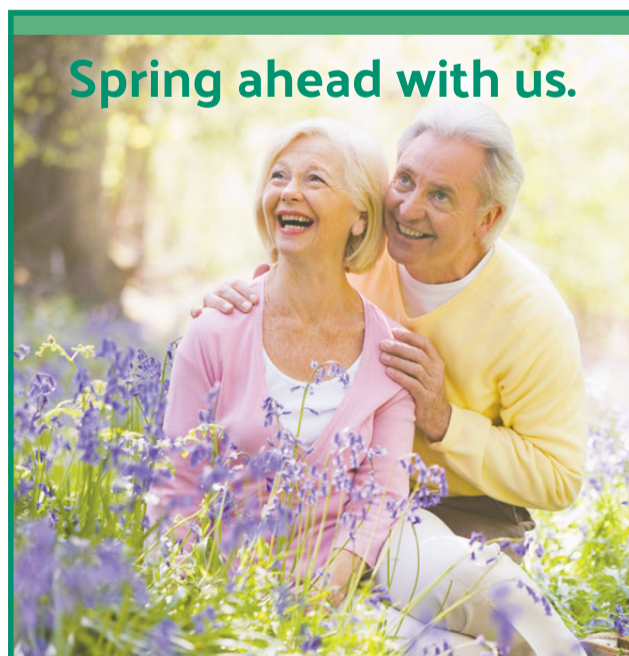
She is requesting damages, "including front pay, back pay, treble damages and statutory penalty, interest, emotional distress and pain and suffering, compensatory damages, punitive damages, and any damages or penalties available at law."

Sherry Ihde worked

in Mayo Clinic's Bacteriology Lab for 23 years. While she was granted a religious exemption from taking the vaccine on Nov. 24, 2021, Ihde opposed Mayo Clinic's rule that exempt employees must be tested for COVID-19 on a weekly basis.

"Plaintiff Ihde then filed a further request for a religious accommodation to exempt her from undergoing weekly COVID-19 testing," according to the complaint.

After Mayo Clinic denied her request, Ihde was fired on Feb. 21, 2022.



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