

POWOW HAS SOMBER TOUCH



MSU DOWNS BEMIDJI STATE

STUDENTS GET BACK TO BAND

A breakthrough COVID-19 death

Family stresses importance of vaccinations

By Brian Arola barola@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — While they process her loss, Dianne Honermann's loved ones remember her as a caring wife, a wise and thoughtful mother, a cheerful grandmother and a devout Christian.

The Mankato woman's husband, two sons, daughter and seven grandchildren are dealing with the pain of

losing her to COVID-19 complications on Aug. 17 after a breakthrough infection months after being vaccinated.

Their tragedy hasn't shaken their understanding of the importance of vaccinations, with her husband and children saying they hope hearing about her inspires more people to protect themselves and those around them.

"While the vaccine ultimately was not able to save her life, it is abso-

lutely clear that the vaccines do and are working," wrote her son Brian Honermann in response to questions sent to the family.

It hurts badly, he added, to know his mother fits into the "very small sliver of a sliver of a sliver" of vaccinated individuals who ended up dying of COVID-19. The reality of the vaccines is they're still safe, effective and the "only viable option for our country and the world to get out of this pandemic," he said.



Courtesy of the Honermann family

Dianne Honermann and her husband, Alan, both tested positive for COVID-19 in July after being vaccinated earlier this year. His case was relatively mild, but she died from it in August after 17 days in the hospital.

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Marla Farnham
Robert "Bob" isenberg
Sally Louise Reams
Susan Rucker
Arlis Wallace

MORE ONLINE

The week in photos

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WEATHER, PAGE B10

Humid, windy

High in the upper 80s. Low in the mid 60s.



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Mankato, Minnesota

FUN & WORK

Fun.com spending half-million to house out-of-town workers in local hotels



Photos by Pat Christman

Workers in Fun.com's warehouse pull costumes to prepare them for shipping at the company's North Mankato headquarters.

Labor shortage felt by costume retailer

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

Fun.com has grown into the world's largest online-only costume retailer, with an army of workers needed — particularly as Halloween approaches — to fill orders for Ghostbusters, werewolves, zombies and other costumes.

But the dire worker shortage left CEO Tom Fallenstein scrambling for new ways to attract employees, including a new program to book about \$500,000 in area hotel rooms to house workers from outside the area, including Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas.

Called "Halloween Heroes," the initiative aims to attract desperately needed workers and house them until the end of October.

"We did it for about 75 people late last year and it worked, so this year we're looking at getting 300 people in hotels — so it's a whole different level," Fallenstein said.

The hotels are in North Mankato, Mankato and St. Peter. So far they've attracted 100 em-



Fun.com's Wyatt Meinders stacks boxes being shipped out of the company's North Mankato warehouse.

ployees who are staying at hotels.

But the need for more employees is strong. They have about 1,000 employees right now, most from the region, but need 2,000. During their off season, the company has 220 full-time employees.

"Our sales are very strong. We are

up 50% in sales, so we're trying to manage that along with our staffing needs."

Fun.com includes HalloweenCostumes.com, which was created out of the Fallenstein family's garage in

Please see FUN.COM, Page A7

North Mankato eyes 2% levy hike

Higher rate to be set, reduced

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

NORTH MANKATO — The North Mankato City Council is looking at increasing the city's tax levy by 2% in 2022, a move that would still reduce the tax rate by 1% because of new construction and increased property valuations.

City staff is recommending the council ultimately approve a 2% levy increase that would increase the levy by just under \$140,000.

The council at Monday's meeting is expected to set a maximum preliminary tax levy that is higher than that but expects to lower it to the 2% level when the final levy is approved Dec. 20.

"I believe the council is supportive of the 2%," said City Administrator John Harrenstein.

But he said they will likely set the maximum preliminary figure higher Monday so they have options in case any unexpected budget issues arise as they study the budget between now and December.

"This is the kickoff to the '22 budget process. The city will deliberate a number of city funds throughout the fall," Harrenstein said.

He said continued new construction is helping to build tax capacity in the city. But valuations of property have generally been rising, meaning that even with a lower tax rate, most property owners will see a property tax increase.

"We're trying to minimize the impact of any valuation increases for businesses and

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DEATH: Age 77 with no known health issues

Continued from Page A1

"For all of us, getting vaccinated is not just an act of personal protection, but protection of our families," he wrote. "We have children who cannot be vaccinated. (My sister Andrea's husband) Erik Schroeder has ALS and — while vaccinated — is at great risk should he contract COVID-19 incidentally.

"These are not mere personal decisions," he continued. "They impact on our ability as a country and as a world to move on from this pandemic."

Dianne Lunders was born in 1944 and grew up on a farm near Cleghorn, Iowa, with her parents and nine siblings. She graduated as valedictorian from her high school and moved to Sioux City, Iowa, to work at the Toy National Bank.

On the dance floor at Shore Acres Ballroom, she met Alan Honermann, at the time a convertible-driving barber. The two were married July 27, 1968, before eventually settling in Skyline in the Mankato area for the last 47 years, where she supported Alan's work as a longtime salesman for Schaeffer Manufacturing.

Fond memories

Since her death, her family has been running through countless memories of her over the years. Alan recalled the pride his wife took in dressing well after finding a good bargain, her coffee chats with neighbors, and the lengthy evening conversations over the phone with her siblings and friends — described as the "glue" of her large family.

"I would like people to remember my wife as a beautiful, smiling, bright, happy, caring, loving, devout and generous Christian, with lots of energy, physically fit, a good listener," Alan described her. "(She) knew right from wrong, went out of her way to make as many friends as she possibly could, and kept in close contact with these relationships through phone calls, lunches or personal visits."

At least 15 large photo albums maintained by Dianne document many of the memories, including trips and vacations the family took. She'd recently finished a photo album of her mother's side of the family with plans to donate it, along with her mother's wedding dress and veil, to a museum where they grew up.

The devout woman of faith was also halfway through an online "Bible in a Year" class when she died. She spent about one to two hours per day in the class until she went to the hospital.

The memories that most stand out to her daughter, Andrea, are about her "never-ending positivity and energy" along with her continual generosity. Andrea remembers from childhood into adulthood seeing her mother help older people in need of rides, groceries or simply a friendly visit.

"I am so grateful that I was raised within her devotion to God and church," Andrea wrote. "I am so proud of the person she was

and hope to emulate her examples throughout my life."

When Dianne's son Tom was about 10 years old, she was driving him home from an activity. He was enamored with heroism at the time, pondering people's purposes in life and the roles they should serve in them.

The boy asked his mom if she'd die to save the world. He remembers her saying, "wouldn't do me any good," to which he meekly replied that he would.

As he thinks back on what she said, he suspects he or someone else must've done something bad that day to warrant her response. Because she lived her life the opposite of how she responded, Tom wrote.

"She sacrificed for others whenever the opportunity arose," he said. "She gave freely and willingly."

By learning about how she approached life, maybe her example can lead to saved lives after all, he added.

"If the people that read this article are moved to reconsider how they have approached the pandemic with regard to vaccines and masks, and helping and trusting others, perhaps her death will have the heroic effect of saving some lives too," Tom wrote.

For him, the memories he won't be able to make with her are on his mind the most these days. They include more memories she won't have the opportunity to make with seven grandchildren.

There won't be new pictures of her with the flowers Tom sent to her for her birthday and Mother's Day. She'll be absent from the trip to the Military Aviation Museum in Virginia Beach, which had to be rescheduled when COVID-19 hit. And he won't get to see how much hilarity would've ensued if his sons got to give their grandmother her first virtual reality experience with imaginary lightsabers.

Breakthrough case

At 77 years old, Dianne didn't have any known health issues or underlying conditions before her death. She received her second dose of the Pfizer vaccine in March and first began feeling COVID-19 symptoms on July 27, three days after attending a party.

The family said they found out about half of the 60 or so people at the party later tested positive for COVID-19. Unvaccinated and unmasked people were present, and a written response from Tom endorsed by the family stated: "It's obvious now that attending that particular party was not a safe thing to do."

At the time, though, case counts were low. It seemed safe, like everything was getting back to normal.

In hindsight, late July was when cases started ramping up in Blue Earth County and across south-central Minnesota. Case data from the Minnesota Department of Health showed Blue Earth County had about seven new weekly cases in late June and early July, then 28 new cases between July 24-30, then 144 weekly



Photos courtesy the Honermann family

Dianne Honermann holds her grandson, Asher. She died of COVID-19 in August, and her family remembers her as a loving wife, mother of three, grandmother of seven and devout Christian.



Dianne Honermann holds her newborn daughter, Andrea, at the hospital in Mankato in 1977.

confirmed cases a month later. During the week ending Friday, new case counts rose to 229 in the county.

"Now we can see that the small uptick in that average towards the end of July was the beginning of the delta wave hitting their county," Tom stated.

Dianne was admitted to Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato's hospital on Aug. 1. Her breathing was labored by then to go with coughing, lethargy and some confusion.

Her test came back positive for COVID-19, followed by Alan testing positive the next day. He was discharged after a short hospital stay. She remained.

Her family, especially Andrea's husband, Erik, kept friends updated about her plight on a Caring Bridge page. The same page later ended up receiving an outpouring of supportive messages and condolences from friends.

Dianne spent 17 days total in the hospital, seven of them in the intensive care unit on a ventilator. Alan and Tom were with her in the room holding her hand while she was extubated, while Andrea and Brian were with her on the phone, to say their goodbyes as her heart stopped.

From the room, they retrieved the mask she was wearing when she was admitted to the hospital. It's emblazoned with red, white and blue stars.

"She knew that what actu-

ally used to make America great was people taking care of each other," Tom wrote. "She practiced that in her daily life. Wearing a mask to protect others is a patriotic act."

One of the many cruelties of COVID-19 is how different and random the outcomes are. Some can experience it without even knowing it, while others don't survive it.

More than 670,000 Americans and counting are in the latter category. It leaves families wondering why their loved ones were the unlucky ones.

For the Honermann family, Dianne had a severe case ending in tragedy, while Alan had relatively mild symptoms and survived. It's unclear why the outcomes were so different.

But her family, like so many others across the country and world, is forever changed because of it. If everyone had gotten vaccinated, Tom wrote, the delta wave leading to Dianne's death couldn't have happened.

Vaccines aren't just about lowering an individual's chances of dying or being hospitalized from COVID-19, although they're shown to be effective on both counts despite rare breakthrough examples. The point of mass vaccinations is also to prevent more contagious and deadly variants such as delta from getting a foothold in society, increasing the likeli-

hood of breakthrough cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Mayo Clinic Health System began a new series of articles Friday with health care professionals debunking myths about the COVID-19 vaccine. The first question they took on is why people should get vaccinated if they could still get sick from the delta variant.

Unvaccinated people are getting the most severe cases, stated Dr. Martin Herrmann, medical director of Mayo Clinic Health System in Waseca and New Prague.

"There isn't a vaccine that is 100% effective at preventing illness," he stated. "Breakthrough cases of COVID-19 are going to happen, but the percentage is small. Also, the disease in vaccinated people tends to be much less severe than the diseases in unvaccinated people."

Even people who previously had COVID-19 are advised to get vaccinated. Not all people who survive COVID-19 develop antibodies specific to it, according to studies, with the levels of immunity widely varying among those who do develop antibodies.

State health department data through mid-August showed about 108 of the 3,080,074 Minnesotans who were fully vaccinated later died of COVID-19. The percentage equals out to a 0.004% death rate among vaccinated Minnesotans.

In a Facebook post after his mother's death, Tom expressed frustration at seeing people still scoff about the seriousness of COVID-19. Pointing out how most people who get COVID-19 survive it is one of the most common tactics used by people to downplay the pandemic.

"As if a 98% survival rate erases the pain the other 2% and their families experience," Tom wrote.

The pandemic is still life and death for many families, he went on, calling for people to set aside the politics and protect themselves and their fellow Americans by getting vaccinated.

"There is no good reason for America to continue losing mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, friends, or neighbors to COVID-19," he said.

Follow Brian Arola @ BrianArola

Booster drive met with pushback

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Just one month ago, President Joe Biden and his health advisers announced big plans to soon deliver a booster shot of the coronavirus vaccine to all Americans. But after campaigning for the White House on a pledge to "follow the science," Biden found himself uncharacteristically ahead of it with that lofty pronouncement.

Some of the nation's top medical advisers on Friday delivered a stinging rebuke of the idea, in essence telling the White House: not so fast.

A key government advisory panel overwhelmingly rejected Biden's plan to give COVID-19 booster shots across the board and instead recommended the extra vaccine dose only for those who are age 65 or older or who run a high risk of severe disease.

Biden's Aug. 18 announcement that the federal government was preparing to shore up nearly all Americans' protection had been made with great fanfare. It was meant to calm the nerves of millions of Americans fearful of a new, more transmissible strain of the coronavirus.

"The plan is for every adult to get a booster shot eight months after you got your second shot," Biden said, noting that his administration would be ready to begin the program on Sept. 20.

Biden added the qualification that third doses would require the signoff of health officials at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but his public message glossed over the nuance.

"Just remember," he said, "as a simple rule: Eight months after your second shot, get a booster shot."

Biden's plan drew immediate outrage from global health groups that encouraged the United States and other well-off nations to refrain from administering boosters until poorer countries could provide first doses to their most vulnerable citizens.

"Viewed from a global perspective, this is a squandering of a scarce global resource, as a consequence of which people will die," said Dr. Peter Lurie, president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "I feel completely comfortable saying this," he added, acknowledging that domestic political considerations weigh differently on presidents.

The Biden plan was criticized, too, by medical professionals, who cited a lack of safety data on extra doses and raised doubts about the value of mass boosters, rather than ones targeted to specific groups. "It created enormous pressure on the agency to go along with what the White House wanted," said Lurie, who characterized the FDA panel's decision as a "rebuttal" of Biden's efforts to circumvent standard procedures.

The nonbinding recommendation from the outside experts who advise the FDA is not the last word. The FDA will consider the group's advice and make its own decision, probably within days.



The mask Dianne Honermann wore when she went into the hospital with COVID-19 was emblazoned with red, white and blue stars. Wearing a mask as a way to protect others was a patriotic act for her, her family said.