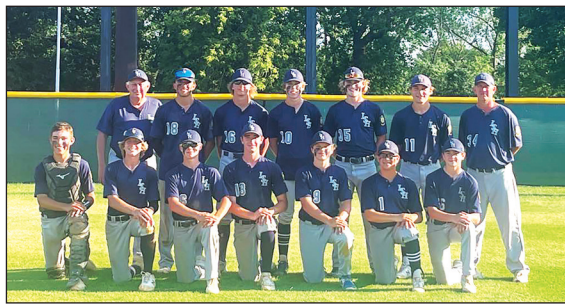




Busy weekend ahead

Plan a weekend of fun! Both the Sibley County Fair and Giant Days are going on this weekend. P. 2



Statebound!

The Le Sueur-Henderson Giants Legion team won the sub-state tournament and advance to state play this week. P. 8



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PRIORITIZE THE PRIMARY: VOTE AUG. 9!

The 2022 Primary Election is this coming Tuesday, Aug. 9. Top of the ballot will be the Sibley County District 1 Commissioner race and the Le Sueur-Henderson School Referendum. Voting will be held in Henderson at the City Hall/Community Building, 600 Main St., from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Le Sueur residents vote at Le Sueur City Hall (lower level), 203 S. Second St., also from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.



TRADE POWER

MNCS students discover passion in the trades

By Rachel Miller
Editor

Many a student who did not fit the mold at traditional K-12 schools has found a home at Henderson's Minnesota New Country School, a public charter school that focuses on student-led learning.

Students have the opportunity to pursue their passions, and MNCS advisors will do what they can to assist.

From a young age, Belle Plaine student Ben Covington, 18, has had an interest in weapons. He said it sparked from the movies he watched as a child, like the Pirates of the Caribbean series, and he even asked Santa Claus for weapons for Christmas when he was 3 years old. Now, as an adult, he wants to pursue a career crafting them.

When Covington approached MNCS Advisor Paul Jaeger about doing his senior project on blade smithing, it did come with some challenges. Other trade-centered projects like building/construction work can be done on site, but knives posed a problem.

Covington reached out to five different blade smiths in



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tejha Martin works on assembling a wooden bench that was part of her junior project. Martin made four wooden benches that were all donated to the Ney Nature Center this spring. She has a passion for construction and hopes to pursue a career in architectural design.

the area, and wound up connecting with Jason Kraus at Northstar Forge out of Carver. Having a professional show him the ropes helped immensely, and he said his attention to detail and precision

went up dramatically.

"You start to notice every little thing that is uneven, or if it has a light bend to it — it sticks out like a sore thumb," Covington said. "Keep a steady hand is another import-

ant thing I learned. Any type of little move or twist, you can see you messed up on the blade."

MNCS TRADES
CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



PHOTO BY RACHEL MILLER

Honeywell Central Region Sales Leader Josh Hounsell and Senior Sales Representative Cindy Auld pitched two options to address some building maintenance needs at the Middle/High School and Hilltop Elementary School using energy and construction savings and long-term facility maintenance funding that is currently allocated for Park Elementary.

A honey of a deal

Honeywell helps LS-H address building needs while saving money

By Rachel Miller
Editor

The Le Sueur-Henderson School Board on Monday night took the next step in addressing some of the needs at the Middle/High School with-

out a referendum.

The school district has partnered with Honeywell Building Technologies to redirect the district's Long Term Facilities Maintenance money from

SCHOOL BOARD
CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Locals represent at the Scott County Fair



PHOTO BY RACHEL MILLER

The Sibley County Fair is coming up this week, but some area residents made the drive to Jordan to participate in the Scott County Fair last week, July 27-31. From left, Tommy Traxler of Faxon Farms Pure Maple Syrup (located in Henderson) are selling their oh so sweet maple syrup in the Commercial Building; Le Sueur residents Linda Kunkel (purple '96 Ford Mustang) and Tom Kunkel (red '71 Chevy Nova) drove to participate in Sunday's Classic Car, Truck and Tractor Show; and Independent Publisher Rachel Miller gives her all in the All American Lumberjack Log Sawing competition at the Sunday, 3 p.m. show. Miller was selected as a crowd participant by Lumberjack Jimmy Anderson, and the pair emerged victorious against the other duo.



PHOTO BY RACHEL MILLER



SUBMITTED PHOTO

SCHOOL BOARD
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Park to needed changes at the Middle/High School.

On Monday night, Honeywell Senior Sales Representative Cindy Auld and Central Region Sales Leader Josh Hounsell presented the school board with two options.

The first option would be contingent on next Tuesday's school referendum passing and would require a \$1 million upfront capital contribution which is included in the bond. The scope of the project would include new lighting, mechanical, water, building envelope and building management systems at Hilltop Elementary School and the Middle/High School, for a total project cost of \$5.885 million.

If the school referendum does not pass, the school district would look at moving forward with the second option. The majority of the work is the same, but the mechanical work at Hilltop is excluded. The total project cost is \$4,648,500, and it requires a \$100,000 capital contribution.

Both projects require a \$92,000 annual capital investment.

Despite the multi-million dollar price tags, Honeywell

is projecting both projects will pay for themselves over time due to energy and construction savings and operating savings.

Option 1: The \$5.885 million option is projected to save the district \$7,213,577 after 20 years. Annual energy savings are projected to increase from \$126,456 in the first year to \$243,112 in year 20. Annual operating savings range from more than \$62,000 to just under \$121,000 throughout the 20-year term. It also includes \$92,009/year in capital cost avoidance. (Cost avoidance focuses on actions that avoid incurring costs in the future, like spending money to maintain a fleet of vehicles to minimize expensive repairs, replacements or a chance of an accident.)

Option 2: Honeywell is projecting this option will save the district \$6,705,991 over a 20-year span. Annual savings range from \$155,726 to \$227,822 per year in energy and construction costs; \$52,847 to \$101,598 in operating savings, and include \$92,015 in capital cost avoidance.

Honeywell was able to lock in a 3.8% interest rate with Pinnacle Bank until Aug. 10, and design and engineering work, including contractor quotes, have already been completed.

Following a question from

board member Matt Hathaway, Hounsell shared that Honeywell sends its numbers to the state to review and ensure there is no risk to the school district.

"Let's say there would be a shortfall, that is something they actually take care of and litigate for you guys to get money. That is a safeguard for the district, that a state agency reviews our work, our verification methods and methodology as they go through each measure," Hounsell said.

Following Honeywell's presentation, the board later in the agenda approved a motion to move forward with Options 1/2, depending on the outcome of this coming Tuesday's election.

SCHOOL MEAL PRICES SKYROCKET

"Frustrating" was the adjective Le Sueur-Henderson Superintendent Jim Wagner used to describe the bids LS-H received for its school meal service....or rather bid.

Competition tends to keep prices low, but in the absence of competition, costs can skyrocket. Unfortunately for LS-H, the district received just one bid, from Elior, for the 2022-23 school year breakfast and lunch services, that includes a 30-40 percent increase.

The school district charged \$1.50 per student breakfast,

\$2.40 for adult breakfast, \$2.75 for K-5 lunch, \$2.90 for 6-12 lunch, and \$3.95 for adult lunch during the 2020-21 school year. Students who qualify for free/reduced benefits are not charged for breakfast or lunch, and kindergarten students can receive breakfast at no charge.

Elior's bid increases those costs to \$2.10 for breakfast and \$3.86 for all lunches, which reflects a 40 percent increase for student breakfast and elementary lunch, and a 33 percent increase for 6-12 grade lunch.

According to meeting documents, this would result in a monthly shortfall between \$1,494.38 and \$2,037.84 from September-January, for a total shortfall of \$9,142.16. The district's Food Service budget does have a reserve to pay those increases, but a full year at the increased prices would wipe out roughly half the reserves.

Wagner said the district has three options:

1. Contact the state and move forward with re-bidding and plan to switch food companies mid-year;
2. "Bite the bullet" for a full year and go back to re-bid the contract for the 2023-24 school year; or
3. Look into becoming self-funded and hire staff to

prepare the meals in-house, starting with the 2023-24 school year.

Wagner felt the last option, to be self-funded, would be hard to do, and the district also wanted to minimize the impact to students.

The district is also taking a hit due to not enough families submitting the needed paperwork for free and reduced meals. The federal government will pay \$2.91/reduced lunch and \$3.31/free lunch, and the state of Minnesota provides 52 cents per reduced lunch. The federal government also offered \$1.97 reimbursement per free breakfast, and state/federal reimbursement for reduced breakfast is also a combined \$1.97.

Unfortunately, Wagner said only about 15-18 percent of qualifying families fill out the form, and they really need about 40 percent. The board discussed ways to up the response, including asking families to fill it out at conferences.

In the end, the board voted to increase meal prices to \$1.80 for breakfast, \$3.20 for K-5 breakfast and \$3.35 for 6-12 grade lunch, which will help offset the shortfall.

PERSONNEL ITEMS

The board approved the following hirings and resignations on Monday night:

Hirings: Ben Wilson as the assistant wrestling coach; Diana Jennings as a Middle/High School language arts teacher; Cassie Wilke as a child life specialist; and Tia Lerud as a middle school social studies teacher.

Resignations: Melissa Holnagel as the 7th grade volleyball coach; Casie Wiebe as a high school Special Education teacher; Mikhayla Clausen as the One Act Play director; and Jody Rittmiller as the Hilltop/Park Elementary Assistant Principal.

The school board also approved contracts with Nate Warden as Community Ed/Adult Basic Education Director; Cheri Youngren as Kids Club Coordinator; Catherine Goettl in Early Childhood and Valerie Danielson as an ABE teacher.

DONATIONS AND GRANTS APPROVED

The school board approved \$3,640 in donations to the school district, which included:

- \$3,040 from the Le Sueur Knights of Columbus for the softball bus to Pipestone and the championship game;
- \$400 from Le Sueur Rotary for the Giant Buddies program; and
- \$200 from the Le Sueur Lions Club for Hilltop staff appreciation.

MNCS TRADES
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Covington also paired his blade smithing interest with a Harbor Freight fellowship. He had to put in 125 hours working with Kraus, and in exchange he received \$1,000 upon completion.

Blade smithing is more than just an interest for Covington — he hopes to make it his career. He has been receiving custom orders for a few months, but is also learning the basics of how to develop a business, such as budgeting and how to balance what he should pay himself vs. put into the business, and trying to set up a website and social media pages.

"MNCS has been super supportive of my crazy ideas," said Covington, who graduated in May. "What is awesome about MNCS is if there is a will, there is a way. You have to prove there is a will, but once you do that, they are stepping on their own feet doing anything they can to make sure you can pursue your dreams."

BUILDING A DREAM

Tejha Martin will be starting

her senior year at MNCS this fall, and is another student with a strong interest in a trade career. She has been exposed to those careers from a young age, as her father is a truck driver. He used to drive all across the country every few weeks, but now drives locally with Meger Enterprises out of Belle Plaine.

"Ever since I can remember, he has taken us to the woods to cut trees and load them into a trailer to take to my grandpa's house, because he heats his house with a wood stove," Martin said.

Martin has gone up in a boom lift to cut tree branches, and she enjoys it so much she was gifted her own chainsaw.

Martin has a strong interest in construction, especially architectural design. As part of her junior project, she made four wood benches for the Ney Nature Center just outside of Henderson. Martin said the first bench took her about two weeks to make, but the final three went much quicker, just a couple of days each.

She was also one of the MNCS students who volunteered to make new wooden steps at Rush River Park this spring.

Martin's dream is to learn more about home construction and build the house her father has been dreaming about since he was a teenager.

"I would like to make that

come to life for him," she said. Martin added that she would also like to build more homeless shelters for people in need.

"These two (Covington and

Martin) are incredibly smart, and the way they make sense of the world is through using their hands to make stuff," Advisor Jaeger said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

MNCS senior Ben Covington is currently pursuing a career as a blade smith. He has had an interest in weapons since he was a child, and recently completed a Harbor Freight fellowship with Jason Kraus of Northstar Forge in Carver.

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