



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

Alan Bibey and Grasstowne’s audience was bathed in sunshine at the Lakes Bluegrass Festival on Friday at the Lakes Music and Events Park just north of Pine River. The 2021 event by comparison was troubled with a drought-breaking heavy rain and a thunderstorm. See story and more photos on page A15.

CROSSLAKE

Design work begins

Intersection preliminary work to begin

By Chelsey Perkins
Brainerd Dispatch

BRAINERD — More in-depth planning is set to begin in earnest for improvements to one of the most prominent intersections in Crosslake.

The Crow Wing County Board authorized a contract with Bolton & Menk engineering firm to assist with public engagement, engineering analysis and final design for the intersection of county highways 3 and 66, scheduled for 2024.

The Aug. 23 decision means preliminary work can commence ahead of construction, the costs of which are almost entirely covered by federal grants.

“The city of Crosslake is a tourist area and the impacts of construction and these types of improvements in that area are important to the city and the businesses, so we want to make sure we’re doing a very good job of public outreach,” said Tim Bray, county engineer.

The planned project comes in response to the 2024 construction of the National Loon Center in Crosslake, which is expected to draw as

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Schools prepare to open doors

Teachers are excited and busy

By Echo Journal Staff
Area school buildings are quickly coming alive again with the start of a new - and normal - school year approaching. Most area students start school Tuesday, Sept. 6, though Crosslake Community School students return to class Thursday, Sept. 1.

Area administrators are excited for the school year - with hopes

students are too - and teachers are busy getting classrooms ready.

Following is a back to school look at area schools.

Pequot Lakes School District

The Pequot Lakes School District heads into the new year with an increase in enrollment over the previous year, though just how

large of an increase is unclear.

The district finished the 2021-22 school year with 1,734 students in grades K-12, and expected a jump to 1,757 this year. Now it looks as though there may be even more students.

“Our enrollment numbers are extremely preliminary,” Superintendent Kurt Stumpf said

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Nancy Vogt / Echo Journal

Tawnia Allyn helps her fifth grade son, Levi, put school supplies in his locker Monday at Pequot Lakes Middle School.

Nisswa’s \$25K donation helps food shelf

By Megan Buffington
Echo Journal

PEQUOT LAKES — The city of Nisswa donated \$25,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Lakes Area Food Shelf in Pequot Lakes last month as food shelves across the state

struggle with rising food prices and demand.

In March, when the Lakes Area Food Shelf first began to see a spike in visitation, they gave presentations to Nisswa and other area city councils to ask for their help.

Nisswa City Council member Jesse Zahn drove the decision to target the money to the food shelf. He was passionate about the need to spend federal dollars to directly assist local citizens.

The council unani-

mously agreed and voted June 21 to donate to the food shelf.

“We’re really happy to have it and honored to have it,” said Mark Casey, Lakes Area Food Shelf board member. “But that money is already gone.”

LAFS and other food shelves are seeing the same things shoppers are seeing: higher prices and less food available.

“These are our friends; these are our neighbors,” said Kathy Adams, LAFS director.

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Student driver stickers give peace of mind

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

PINE RIVER — A column in the PineandLakes Echo Journal in early August caught the attention of two mothers in Pine River.

The subject of State Patrol Sgt. Jesse Grabow’s column was the legality of having a “Student Driver” sticker or magnet on the vehicle of students who are practicing driving for their license or new to driving legally. A parent had asked whether those stickers are legal.

Grabow said they are legal, but he advised

the parent to consider a sticker that is different from the “Student Driver” stickers required on driver’s education cars.

Though maybe not the norm, the column was relatable for Sarah Norman, a mother of three from Pine River who has used a student driver sticker on her vehicle since her oldest, Hunter, began driving approximately two years ago.

“A friend had them for her kids,” Norman said. “When our oldest got his permit, we got one. That’s kind of where I got the idea. I think he

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Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

After reading a column on student driver stickers Aug. 11 Pine River mother Sarah Norman shared her experience with using the stickers. Her son, Tate, said other drivers treat him more kindly when they see the stickers.

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FOOD

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“We’re a community, and that’s what the food shelf is for.”

As food prices go up, many families have to turn to other resources like the food shelf. Even as their prices rise, food shelves have seen a dramatic increase in community need in the last year.

In 2021, LAFS served 4,657 people. Through June 2022, they’ve served 5,000.

Both LAFS and the Pine River-Backus Family Center’s food shelf in Pine River have also struggled with sourcing some foods. The shelves get a majority of their food from Second Har-



Contributed
Nisswa City Council member Jesse Zahn, left, presents a \$25,000 check to Mark Casey, of the Lakes Area Food Shelf in Pequot Lakes, in summer 2022.

vest, a food shelf distributor that allows shelves to purchase upward of three times as much food for the same price as they would at a typical grocery store.

Through the summer, like other shoppers around the country, Second Harvest was unable to provide some products, like peanut butter or bread and other

grains.

Despite these difficulties, the food shelves persevered. They bought from local grocery stores, accepted donations and saw incredible support from their communities, like the donation from the Nisswa City Council and donations from area organizations, businesses, churches and grocery stores.

Inflation remains high. While the cost of living remains high, more people may need to turn to the food shelf for help.

“We see on average five to 10 new families a week, which is huge for us,” Adams said in July.

Some people may be nervous or hesitant about visiting a food shelf, but both the Pequot Lakes and Pine River food shelves strive to be wel-

coming and respectful.

“Your privacy is important,” said LuAnn Gravelle, office manager and food shelf coordinator in Pine River. “We want you to feel like you’re coming to a grocery store.”

While ideally prices will drop, food shelves rely on the continual support from the community to continue to exist and serve those in need.

Monetary donations are best for food shelves that have the connections to resources like Second Harvest, where they can purchase more with the same amount someone else could at a grocery store.

Shelves also appreciate food donations, both fresh produce and non-perishables, volunteers

and support for their events.

Lakes Area Food Shelf’s annual fundraiser, the Nisswa Christmas Home Tour, is especially important to them. This October will be the 31st fundraiser, with all ticket proceeds going to the food shelf.

For more information or to purchase a ticket, visit lafshometour.com.

Both food shelves are appreciative of the help they receive from the community and want to make sure that it is known.

“Our continued support from everyone is so important to us,” said Gravelle. “Thank you.”

Megan Buffington, Echo Journal reporter, may be reached at megan.buffington@pineandlakes.com. She is a 2021 Pequot Lakes High School graduate who attends the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

ROAD

From Page A1

many as 200,000 visitors each year to the Whitefish Chain community.

The loon center will be located on the grounds of the Cross Lake Recreation Area, operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which previously indicated it would not allow more parking to be constructed at the site.

In anticipation of pedestrian safety concerns associated with that influx of traffic, the city of Crosslake and Crow Wing County pursued a Transportation Alternatives grant through the Federal Highway Administration three separate times.

The third time proved successful, earning the city \$610,000 toward construction costs.

A separate grant the county pursued through the Federal Land Access Program resulted in \$850,000 toward the improvements.

The western arm of the intersection is the entrance to the recreation area and campgrounds, some of the only federal property in the county.

“The schedule is very important in this particular project, because all of this is in reaction to the coming in of the



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal
The intersection of Crow Wing County highways 3 and 66 are scheduled for improvement in 2024 in anticipation of construction of the National Loon Center at the Cross Lake Recreation Area.

loon center,” Bray said. “ ... And so we want to have that done by the time that opens in 2024, so this is a very compressed timeline. It’s shorter than anything we would even be able to develop in house, and that’s another reason why we’re using a consultant.”

In late 2021, Bray presented a roundabout concept drawing for the intersection when seeking permission to apply for the Federal Land Access Program grant.

He emphasized then and again Aug. 23 the final design is yet to come, and public input and professional engineering services will play a role in settling on the intersection’s future.

Bolton & Menk did not submit the lowest bid for the request for proposals, but Bray said a five-member panel including representatives from the county, city and Corps of Engineers determined the firm would provide the greatest value when considering all selection criteria.

When it comes to entering contracts for professional services, local governments may take into consideration more criteria than cost alone.

“Because of their project team, the familiarity with the area - there’s a component, because they are the current city engineer, they know the area, they’re working on some of the other projects that are

coming in that will be adjacent to this,” Bray said. “And then, like I said, key personnel. They have a project team that was assigned to the intersection improvement down by the hockey rink (Essentia Health Sports Center in Brainerd) with this roundabout. So that very same team was assigned to this.”

Bolton & Menk’s proposal amounts to \$468,407 for engineering services. This cost is not covered by the grant dollars and will be split with the city of Crosslake in accordance with the county highway department’s cost-share policy.

Also submitting proposals were WSB and Widseth, with proposed fees ranging from \$300,000 to \$545,000.

Crosslake Mayor Dave Nevin, who participated in the evaluation panel, attended the Aug. 23 county board meeting.

“The process was fabulous and we look forward to moving on,” Nevin said after the commissioners voted in favor of the contract.

Crosslakers to host town meeting

The Crosslakers will host a town meeting regarding this project from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 16, at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers campground.

Learn more about all the assets the city has and help guide the direction for Crosslake’s future.

Following a Minnesota Design Team visit in 2016, and answering requests echoed throughout the community, Crosslake organizations went to work to accomplish the following:

- ▶ A new facility for the Crosslake Community School.
- ▶ A new home for the Northern MN Railroad Trackers.
- ▶ Improved water quality in the lakes with storm water management.
- ▶ A dog park.
- ▶ Pickleball and improved tennis courts.
- ▶ New outdoor hockey rink and improved warming house.
- ▶ State of the art playground.
- ▶ Home to the National Loon Center.

The Minnesota Design Team will return for this interactive community meeting, where participants will hear how these assets are working and more about what’s to come, including plans for sidewalks, pedestrian movement and intersection improvements along County Road 66.

Chelsey Perkins, Brainerd Dispatch community editor, may be reached at 218-855-5874 or chelsey.perkins@brainerddispatch.com. Follow on Twitter at twitter.com/DispatchChelsey.

STICKER

From Page A1

drove with them basically the whole time.”

Norman said on occasions that her children have been driving without the stickers, she noted a real change in the drivers around them.

She posted in support of the idea, and it got another local parent thinking.

Melanie Lindquist has four children. Three of them have yet to get their drivers licenses, and she might consider learning from Norman’s experience. She said when her oldest was learning to drive, other motorists showed a great deal of impatience as she encountered new things and had to learn from them.

“There were just a few instances where we were in Brainerd and she was hesitant about pulling

into traffic,” Lindquist said. “She wasn’t sure how fast traffic was coming and she got nervous. We had someone behind us honking at her, which doesn’t make it any better. It just made her more nervous. I just thought, if there was a sticker on our car they would be nicer to her.”

She even noticed how impatient other drivers were with her daughter when they were driving the speed limit.

Lindquist said after seeing Norman’s comment, she is going to get a sticker or magnet. But she is worried her next in line will feel singled out to have a magnet on her car.

“I’m going to do it, but I bet my next child coming up is not going to want it on the car because it’s not normal,” Lindquist said. “Like it will make her stand out.”

As for the Normans, Hunter said he liked the

magnet and didn’t feel embarrassed to have it on his vehicle.

“I wasn’t self conscious,” Hunter said. “I think it helped. I had people slow down behind me. It’s just a caution sign. It’s definitely safer to have those, I think.”

His brother, Tate, said he also feels happy to have it on the vehicle while he is learning. When they drive without the sticker, he’s noticed the drivers around him behave differently.

“People get annoyed way easier if I don’t have the sticker on,” Tate said. “They don’t give as much space. They’re right on my tail.”

With the sticker, he noticed more patience and fewer signs of disapproval.

“I like it. They don’t give me the finger at all,” Tate said.

At the very least, the stickers give parents a peace of mind.

“I feel like drivers are more patient,” Norman said. “If I could drive with it myself I would. We have family in Iowa so we drive down there. We like to have them try and drive on the interstate. It’s really a 90-degree difference. I think it gives them more room to learn without people right on his tail. I think for young drivers that can really stress them out.”

Lindquist said in France, student drivers are required to have a large “A” on their vehicle identifying them as an apprentice driver. It’s something she wouldn’t mind seeing at home.

“When I was in France I was there with a host brother and sister,” Lindquist said. “My host sister was in the middle of doing driver’s education stuff. We were talking about that sticker. As soon as they get their license they actually have to have that sticker for

three years, and that makes so much sense to me. People are more careful around them, more compassionate as to why they’re making mistakes or going a little slower.”

Norman would like all student drivers to receive one automatically.

“I’d like to see them given out at driver’s ed,” she said. “They aren’t crazy expensive. I think it would be a nice thing to have on cars.”

Mike Lupella, Pine River-Backus driver’s education instructor for five years, was the instructor for Norman’s and Lindquist’s children. He feels like the student driver sticker on his own instructional vehicle makes nearby motorists drive more carefully and show better driving habits around him.

“I hope that sticker on a parent’s car would do the same thing,” Lupella said. “Give people a little

more follow distance with a little more patience. And if they were planning on making a driving error, they might second guess that and try to demonstrate good driving skills in front of the student driver.”

Lupella said one of his instructional methods is to point out driving errors and ask his students to identify what went wrong.

“You don’t want to be that part of the driving lesson,” Lupella said.

As for legality, there is at least one thing to be cautious about.

Grabow said, “If you do place a sign or decal on the vehicle, make sure that it is not in a windshield or window as that would be an equipment violation and safety issue.”

Travis Grimler is a staff writer for the Pineandlakes Echo Journal weekly newspaper in Pequot Lakes/Pine River. He may be reached at 218-855-5853 or travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com.

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