

Jack's Big Bass Bash raises over \$18K

By Megan Buffington
Echo Journal

CROSSLAKE — People gathered on the docks and deck of Crosslake's Moonlite Bay for the first Jack's Big Bass Bash Fishing Tournament and silent auction Sunday, Aug. 7.

The 50-boat tournament, auction and donations at the event raised over \$18,000 for suicide awareness in schools and the community in honor of Jack Hennies, a Pequot Lakes graduate who took his own life in January.

The funds will go toward the Lighthouse Project, a local, student-led organi-

zation focused on mental health and suicide prevention.

Money will also go toward Jack's Jumps, a memorial park that will improve the terrain park experience at Mount Ski Gull.

Harry Neva and Sawyer Zeidler won the tournament with a 16.56-pound bag of five bass. They also won the big bass category with a 4.08 pound bass.

Megan Buffington, Echo Journal intern, may be reached at 218-855-5854 or megan.buffington@pineandlakes.com. She is a 2021 Pequot Lakes High School graduate who attends the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



Megan Buffington / Echo Journal

The first round of boats enters Moonlight Bay from Cross Lake on Aug. 7 to weigh in their fish for Jack's Big Bass Bash Fishing Tournament on the docks of the Moonlite Bay restaurant.

'IT'S A GROUP EFFORT'

Family named Crow Wing County Farm Family of the Year

By Frank Lee
Brainerd Dispatch

Brainerd

Dean and Briana Visser and their children are used to horsing around.

Their hard work as owners and operators of the Benville Equestrian Center in Pequot Lakes earned them the 2022 Crow Wing County Farm Family of the Year award, which they received Thursday, Aug. 4, at the Crow Wing County Fair.

Eighty-five farm families and operations — the most in recent memory — were honored Thursday by the University of Minnesota at the 2022 Farm Family of the Year ceremony at the annual Minnesota Farmfest near Redwood Falls; the Vissers chose to attend the county fair.

"We are very excited and surprised and we feel like it's a group effort," Briana Visser said shortly before the award presentation. "There's a lot of people at our stable that I



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Crow Wing County Commissioner Steve Barrows presents the 2022 Crow Wing County Farm Family of the Year award to Briana and Dean Visser, who own the Benville Equestrian Center near Pequot Lakes, and their children Alexis Gerst, Ryan Visser and grandson Jaxon on Thursday in the Birney Wilkins Memorial Garden at the Crow Wing County Fairgrounds.

think helped contribute to this award and a lot of family members as well."

Dean and Briana

Visser purchased 80 acres of land from her grandfather in 1992. The married couple established Benville

Equestrian Center, naming it after her grandparents, Bennie and LaVelle Myers. The property also includes

a tree farm and provided hay fields and pastureland.

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Locals file for election

Incumbents and newcomers are getting their names on ballots for the upcoming general election.

Two incumbent Pine River-Backus School Board members and the incumbent Nisswa mayor will seek a return to office after filing Thursday, Aug. 4, along with an appointed Pequot Lakes City Council member, a longtime Lake Shore City Council and former mayor, and a newcomer in Backus.

In addition, there will be at least a three-way race for mayor in Crosslake, where two newcomers also filed for two open city council seats as of Friday, Aug. 5.

As of Monday, Aug. 8, Roman Siltman has filed for Jenkins City Council and Scott Eppen has filed for Emily mayor, two applicants who do not currently serve on the respective councils.

No application has yet been announced for the Jenkins mayor seat. Current mayor Jon Lubke is seeking the Crow Wing County District 2 seat.

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Prevent the AIS spread

Aquatic Invasive Species inspectors provide insight into life at the access

By Megan Buffington
Echo Journal

CROW WING COUNTY — If you've used a public lake access in the last 30 years, you've probably talked to a watercraft inspector.

They ask you a few questions for their surveys like, "Where was your boat last? How long was your boat out of the water?" or, if you're leaving the lake, "How long was your boat in the water? Where are you going next?"

The questions may seem tedious, but they are one part in the goal

SPREAD: Page 6



Megan Buffington / Echo Journal
Chad Burbach, shown in July 2022, is a law compliance representative and aquatic invasive species trainer for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Graduates return for 48th annual reunion

PEQUOT LAKES — Pequot Lakes held their 48th annual All Class Reunion Sunday, Aug. 7 in the Pequot Lakes High School cafeteria.

Around 65 people attended.

The Class of 1972 was the honored class, celebrating its 50-year reunion. The 55-member class had a three-day event with gatherings Friday and Saturday with 22 members attending. Seven members attended the reunion Sunday.

Ten members of the

class have died.

During the program, Don Bye, Class of 1951, was recognized as the oldest graduate attending.

In the business meeting, Betty Simenstad was re-elected president.

Vice President Vicki Palmer read the names of those that have died since the last reunion, and there was a moment of silence in their memory.

REUNION: Page 5

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CALENDAR

WEEKLY

► **Tuesdays:** Hackensack Children's Fishing Contest, Birch Lake, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (thru Aug. 16)

► **Tuesdays:** Big Fun Tuesdays, 1-3 p.m., Crosslake Town Square (thru Aug. 16)

► **Wednesdays:** Turtle races, 2 p.m., downtown Nisswa (thru Aug. 17)

► **Fridays:** Pine River Depot open, craft sale, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

► **Fridays:** Pine River Duck Races, 1:30 p.m., Pine River dam (thru Aug. 19)

► **Fridays:** Pine River Market Square, 2:30-5:30 p.m., Pine River Depot (thru Sept. 23)

AUGUST

► **10:** Beef Feed, 4-8 p.m., Ideal Fire Hall

► **10:** Central Lakes Community Performing Arts: Monroe Crossing, 7 p.m., Central Lakes College outdoors stage, Brainerd

► **10:** Lakes Area Music Festival: Rain & Red Clay

► **10-11:** Pequot Lakes Community Theater: Auditions for "You Can't Take it With You," 6-9 p.m., Pequot Lakes High School auditorium

► **11-13:** Crosslake Art Club art show, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Crosslake Community Center

► **12-13:** Nisswa Crazy Days

► **12-14:** Backus Cornfest: parade, 2 p.m. Aug. 13; fireworks, dusk Aug. 13

► **12-14:** Lakes Area Music Festival: Ariadne Auf Naxos

► **12-14:** Rotary Ends Human Trafficking Music Festival, Lakes Music and Events Park, Pine River

► **12:** Central Lakes Community Performing Arts: Disney's "Frozen" 2013 film, dusk, Central Lakes College south lawn, Brainerd

► **13:** Dru Sjodin Purple Elephant walk/run, 9 a.m., Trailside Park, Pequot Lakes

► **13:** Camp Knutson Quilt Auction

► **13:** Crosslake firefighters pig roast, 11 a.m. until gone, Crosslake Fire Hall

► **13:** Northwoods Art and Book Festival, Hackensack

► **13:** Cardboard boat races, Moonlite Bay, Crosslake

► **13:** Music in the Park: Fourteen Stories, 6 p.m., Crosslake Town Square gazebo

► **13:** Bands in the Park: Daybreak, 7-9 p.m., Trailside Park, Pequot Lakes

► **15:** Lakes Area Music Festival: Open rehearsal, Santos & Haydn, 1:15 p.m., Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts, Brainerd

► **17:** Lakes Area Music Festival: Santos & Haydn

FAMILY

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"I met Dean, my husband, at a wedding rehearsal in Ada, Minn.," Briana Visser stated on the center's website. "His pickup line was, 'Hey, do you wanna see some horses?' And as they say, the rest is history. Yes, Dean's family had horses and ponies, too."

Briana Visser's grandfather, Bennie Myers, bought a pony for her, her first, and she began paying for what became the property that would become home to Benvelle Equestrian Center.

Benvelle Equestrian Center provides boarding opportunities for horses as well as education for both horse and rider. The facility includes a stable, indoor and outdoor riding arena, exercise rings, obstacle areas and many acres of wooded riding trails.

"There are four 4-H kids here at the county fair this week that

SPREAD

From Page 1

of slowing the spread of aquatic invasive species in beloved Minnesota waters.

"We're trying to make sure that people are in compliance when they're coming to the lake and when they're leaving the lake," said Chad Burback, law compliance representative and AIS trainer for the Department of Natural Resources. "It's illegal to transport aquatic vegetation; it's illegal to transport infested water. That's where the whole plug law comes in."

Since 2010, Minnesota law requires that a watercraft's drain plug be removed before and during transportation. The implementation of the "pull the plug" law, as well modifications to it and additional laws passed in 2011 aimed at preventing the spread of AIS, led to a change in the inspection program.

Rather than just being the "weed police," as Burback remembers people calling them, and removing aquatic vegetation from boats and trailers, inspectors ensure that drain plugs are being pulled in accordance with the law and inform boaters about their efforts.

"Now we realize this is how zebra mussels and spiny water fleas and even plant fragments are getting spread," Burback said. "That's when they came out with these."

"These" are the decontamination stations, essentially just hot water pressure washers. Level two inspectors, like Burback, man the stations.

Not only are they helpful in rinsing off boats that come out of the water with lots of weeds, but the hot water ensures that anything else that may spread by living on the surface of the boat or trailer is killed.

"For instance, the zebra mussels thing, which is kind of what they're invented for, is when (watercraft) has been sitting in the water for 24 hours or more," Burback said. "There's a risk that the veligers, which are

have their horses boarded at our stable, and they compete in halter Western classes, English classes, gaming classes and also the 4-H drill team," Briana Visser said before receiving a plaque from Crow Wing County Commissioner Steve Barrows.

Dean Visser oversees the boarding operation and takes care of property maintenance. Briana Visser does the bookkeeping and education programs. Daughter Alexis handles the marketing and social media, and son Ryan helps with maintenance, repairs and building projects.

The Farm Family of the Year program is sponsored by the University of Minnesota and honors families across the state who are actively engaged in farming or agricultural production, Barrows explained as he honored the Visser family during Thursday's program.

"The Visser family is a proud sponsor of Minnesota 4-H and is active in Crow Wing County 4-H by creating a space for



Megan Buffington / Echo Journal

Raymond DeZurik is an AIS inspector for Crow Wing County.

the juvenile zebra mussels - microscopic - have attached to their boat. In that case, I take basically a garden hose attachment - I just go around the boat, flush it with hot water."

The initial inspection, though, begins with the survey questions.

"The questions are all the same, whether you're a volunteer, whether you work for the county, whether you work for the DNR," Burback said. "And that's to determine, is it a risk for you to launch?"

The DNR website says there are 26 staffed decontamination units in Minnesota. While there are some permanent sites, including one in Crosslake, most units are mobile.

The idea is to have decontamination stations at busier accesses on busier days, but that doesn't get every boat. The hope is to make the units more accessible and decontamination a regular part of every boater's routine.

"We have to clean, drain, dry. But, if you're worried about spreading (AIS) or you think you may be at risk, 'Hey, I've been in the water too long,' or 'God, my boat is so covered in weeds, I'm never going to be able to pick them off,' being able to find a decontamination unit is huge," Burback said.

The DNR website lets boaters see where decontamination stations will be up to two weeks in the future. They are also handing out stickers with

a QR code directing people to that website to help spread the word.

Burback hopes people will use the resource and make decontamination a part of their schedule. If they're traveling to another lake or heading to put their boat in the water, he wants people to check and see if there is a unit on their way or nearby.

The watercraft inspection program has changed a lot since it began in 1992. Burback worked as an intern for the DNR in 2008 and 2009, before the plug law was in place. At the time, not many lakes had zebra mussels, the DNR didn't have decontamination units and inspectors had a more limited role.

Then, when Burback joined the DNR in 2015, he faced the early pushback against the stricter AIS laws.

"In 2015, there was a little more of an attitude," Burback said. "'Oh, why do I gotta pull my drain plug. I never used to pull it, you know, for 50 years,' and 'What does it matter if I take a plant from this lake and put it in the other lake, aren't they all the same? Isn't it the ducks and turtles bringing it back and forth?'"

Even then, Burback was quick to fulfill his duty as an educator. He'd inform boaters that ducks preen themselves, so they don't spread AIS; and turtles don't move fast enough from lake to lake to spread them either.

young people to learn through the care of working with horses," Barrows said to those who gathered at the Birney Wilkins Memorial Garden at the fairgrounds.

Those honored cover a wide spectrum of farming, from traditional crops and livestock to community-based ventures focused on organics and traditional native foods, according to the University of Minnesota Extension website.

"This year's Minnesota's Farm Families of the Year reflect the breadth and variety of agriculture in our state," stated Extension Dean Bev Durgan in a news release. "The University of Minnesota is proud to honor these families and their innovation and dedication to Minnesota agriculture."

The Farm Family Recognition Program has honored Minnesota farmers since 1979. It is coordinated by the University of Minnesota Extension, the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, and the

College of Veterinary Medicine.

"We should remember that these county fairs are about the ag community. And a lot of times we forget that because we go eat the fried foods, we go down to the midway. ... We should be very proud of these people that put their time in," Barrows said of Dean and Briana Visser.

And it's a lot of time the Vissers put into operating their stable.

"With the busy schedule that includes feeding, turnout, stall cleaning, sweeping the barn, training horses, teaching lessons, guiding trail rides, attending clinics and horse shows, and then feeding and doing chores again at the end of the day, days can become long and strenuous," Briana Visser wrote at Benvelle Equestrian Center's website.

"Although working from sunup till sundown can take its toll, at the end of the day it's all worth it."

FRANK LEE may be reached at 218-855-5863 or at frank.lee@brainerddispatch.com. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/DispatchFL.

He would tell them the DNR has maps showing infestations spreading along major highways and how AIS usually get discovered at public accesses.

"We used to hear a lot more of that," Burback said. "From 2015 to now, I think it's night and day."

While Burback still encounters the occasional grump, he said growing awareness means he actually gets thanked all the time now. People are happy that he, and the state as a whole, are working to keep the water clean.

At the core of the inspection program is education. The hope is that enough people are educated about AIS and prevention so not as many inspectors will be needed.

"It's like getting in a car and putting on a seat belt. It's the same thing," Burback said. "Cleaning off vegetation, draining your water, it's the law. We want people to just do this on their own."

But until education and awareness are more widespread, people are needed to monitor public accesses. Burback is just one of many inspectors in the lakes area and across the state. It takes a lot of manpower to staff all the major accesses.

That's where people like Raymond DeZurik come in.

DeZurik is a watercraft inspector employed by Crow Wing County. He works at the Clamshell Lake access on Ruttgert Road. This is his seventh summer as an inspector, and he didn't mention stopping any time soon.

"I love it," DeZurik said. "You're protecting the lakes; you're doing something. Number two, I have diabetes, and I'm a little fluffy, (so it) gets me a lot of exercise during the summer."

People like DeZurik, willing to sit at an access on weekends to cover areas that may not otherwise be staffed, help with the mission of slowing the spread of AIS. Often, people find that the job is more fun than its description makes it seem. Some read a book, watch movies or, in DeZurik's words,

watch "God's TV set."

"(There are) fox here, I've had deer walk within 10 feet of me. Just about 40 feet from here I had a porcupine," DeZurik said. "The things I see. I mean, it's amazing."

Those interested in seeing turkey vultures send a bald eagle into the lake, another sight of DeZurik's, or looking for an extra weekend job might find just what they're looking for as a watercraft inspector.

Burback thinks more participation in the DNR's volunteer training could help get more accesses monitored.

"There's a lot of really small lakes that maybe even on a weekend only get half a dozen people," Burback said. "To pay somebody to go sit there, it's expensive."

He would like to see more lake associations and lake residents get involved. He suggested lake residents rotate weekends for people to man the access and help educate incoming boaters.

Other volunteer programs, like Starry Trek, where people across the state search for starry stonewort, help get people involved and slow the spread of AIS.

There is still progress to be made in staffing, education and attitudes, but Burback is glad to see his and others' efforts are paying off.

"It is working. I feel like the spread has slowed down," Burback said. "When zebra mussels came into this area, it was quick. Every year you were reading about a dozen new lakes. We don't see the new infestation emails as often. So, I feel like it's making a difference."

For Burback, the difference isn't just professional. It's personal, too.

"I have a 4-year-old child," Burback said. "And I hope that all these lakes aren't choked up by weeds and invasive species by the time she's old enough to enjoy it."

Megan Buffington, Echo Journal intern, may be reached at 218-855-5854 or megan.buffington@pineandlakes.com. She is a 2021 Pequot Lakes High School graduate who attends the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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