

PATRIOT POWER



Dan Determan / Echo Journal

Pequot Lakes sixth-grader Isaiah Kelm evades a tackler as the middle school football players took the field during halftime of the varsity Patriots' game against Thief River Falls on Friday.

"I WILL ALWAYS BE ABLE TO FEED THE KIDS - A PARENT NEVER HAS TO WORRY ABOUT THAT. WHETHER OR NOT IT IS EXACTLY WHAT IS ON THE MENU IS ANOTHER STORY."

PATTY BUELL, PEQUOT LAKES FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR

SCHOOLS WATCH FOR SHORTAGES

Pequot Lakes, Pine River-Backus monitor food products, drivers, staff

By Travis Grimler
and Dan Determan
Echo Journal

The Pine River-Backus School District is out of the weeds but watching the horizon cautiously. Food Service Director Jilline Blanchard said there have not been any food shortages yet; however, there have been occasions where the district

has gotten substitutes for foods she serves to students. That means they still have plenty of the food on their menu. But when they order pizza, it might not be the exact same pizza they have been using. "I'll send an order for eight cases of Gilardi pizza and they might not have eight cases of Gilardi pizza,"

Blanchard said. "They might have four Tony's. They have a new policy where they send the closest match." Blanchard is aware that some places are having supply chain issues, and she is keeping an eye out for shortages. But the district hasn't been lacking in anything yet. "I wouldn't say that

I've had a food shortage," Blanchard said. "But there is definitely concern." Blanchard said her suppliers also provide inventory lists, which she watches when she places orders. She said students likely haven't noticed any changes. Unlike PR-B, the Pequot Lakes School District is seeing

plenty of issues on the food service side, with everything from food to paper products. "We order two times a week from our vendor, and usually get back a list of 15 to 20 items that are out," Food Service Director Patty Buell said in an email. "Some of them they can substitute and some just go unfilled." **SHORTAGES:** Page A6

JENKINS

Flategraff appointed to City Council



Flategraff

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

The Jenkins City Council appointed resident Jerimie Flategraff to complete the term vacated by Donna Stricker on July 22.

That terms run through 2022. After going over the city's official policy for appointing council members, the council at its regular meeting Tuesday, Oct. 12, met three

candidates who applied to fill the position: Debbie Siltman, Roman Siltman and Flategraff. Each candidate was present, allowing them to stand and describe themselves to the council before

the council performed roll call votes for each candidate. Flategraff was chosen with three votes in favor and one against.

FLATEGRAFF: Page A6

Miller pleads guilty to securities fraud scheme

Two men - including Mark Allen Miller of Breezy Point - entered guilty pleas to securities fraud charges in connection to their illegal pump-and-dump stock manipulation scheme, Acting U.S. Attorney W. Anders Folk

announced in a news release. Miller resigned his Breezy Point City Council seat in June, halfway into his first year in office, after it was learned he'd been indicted for securities fraud in U.S. District Court in Minneapo-

lis. He entered his guilty plea Thursday, Oct. 14, the news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Minnesota, said. According to their guilty pleas, Miller, 44, and Christopher James Rajkaran,

36, of Queens, New York, and Guyana, participated in a scheme to hijack and assume control over dormant public shell companies, the news release said.

MILLER: Page A6



Miller

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Breast Cancer Awareness feature inside!
See pages B1 and B2

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, an annual campaign to raise awareness about the impact of breast cancer. In this section we feature local women who have and/or are battling breast cancer. Show your support as we rise together to help and uplift women in our community.



CASS COUNTY

Happy Dancing Turtle receives \$200,000 grant

Grant will go toward mobile livestock slaughter unit

By Kyndra Johnson
Correspondent

A Happy Dancing Turtle project to assist area ranchers with cattle processing received a financial boost from Cass County.

The Cass County Board on Tuesday, Oct. 5, approved funding of \$200,000 to Happy Dancing Turtle in Pine River as part of the American Rescue Plan Act grant.

Happy Dancing Turtle, in collaboration with other area organizations, reported in its grant

application the \$200,000 would be a 10% match for an Economic Development Administration grant the organization is also pursuing. The grants, if approved, would be used to purchase a mobile slaughter unit and associated equipment for livestock on Cass County and other farms in the Region Five area.

The grant application noted there was a major disruption to food supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the meat processing and distribution indus-

try. A mobile slaughter unit would allow local farmers and ranchers to process their cull cows under U.S. Department of Agriculture or similar state-approved inspections.

Central Lakes College's Staples campus also will offer a meat-cutting program beginning in fall 2022, which will use the unit as a training facility.

Questions from county commissioners included how carcasses would be stored after slaughter and if other local organizations/grocery stores were in approval of the mobile unit.

A Happy Dancing Turtle representative said

approximately 50 different organizations have expressed support for the mobile slaughter unit and they are creating a local brand to market the processed meat in local grocery stores, schools, service clubs and restaurants.

Also, as part of the proposed mobile slaughter unit, there is a refrigeration room and there are refrigeration units on the Central Lakes College Staples campus for storage of carcasses before processing.

Happy Dancing Turtle, a nonprofit organization based in Pine River, states it is dedicated to growing good stewards of the planet by pro-

viding education, programs and experiences for youths and adults who inspire wonder and empower change. For more information, visit happydancingturtle.org.

In other business Oct. 5, the county board:

- ▶ Approved the 2022 cafeteria plan costs and plan contributions as recommended by the Insurance Committee.
- ▶ Heard from Chief Financial Officer Sandra Norikane that the 2020 audited finance statements and the management and compliance report have been posted to the county's website and will be published in the newspaper shortly. There were no changes

since they were presented to the board previously. Norikane said all prior audit findings were cleared and there were no new findings in the current year.

- ▶ Heard an update from Carl Newbanks, Initiative Foundation grants and development manager, regarding the Initiative Foundation's 2020 response in Cass County. Newbanks reported there were numerous projects funded that were referred from DEED and for every local dollar contributed the Initiative Foundation invested \$4.36 back into Cass County.

Kyndra Johnson is the Cass County correspondent.

PLMS Students of the Month

Celebrating a Students of the Month luncheon from Pequot Middle School are, from left: Jayda Quisberg, Gabrielle Vershey, Cora Carlson, William Melberg, Rock Holubar, Nic Foster and Ethan Moser.

Contributed / Pequot Lakes Middle School



FLATEGRAFF

From Page A1

Roman Siltman came close with two votes in favor and two against. City policy dictates that Flategraff will now complete Stricker's term.

The council also made appointments to the planning

commission. Initially there was only one position open; however, council member and liaison Andrew Rudlang chose to vacate his position on the commission to allow two of the four applicants to join.

Candidates were: Sean Smuda, Debbie Siltman, Roman Siltman and Jason Baca. Smuda was selected with unanimous approval. Roman

Siltman took the second seat with three votes. Debbie Siltman received two and Baca received one.

Learn more about Flategraff in a story on page A2 in this issue of the Echo Journal.

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.

MILLER

From Page A1

The defendants used their control over the companies to fraudulently manipulate and pump up the price of the companies' stock so that they could profit from the sale of stock to unwitting investors.

The defendants carried out their scheme by obtaining hundreds of thousands or even millions of shares of stock in dormant public shell companies that traded over-the-counter at low prices, often for less than a fraction of a penny per share. The defendants then assumed control over the shell companies by creating fake and filing fake resignation letters and board resolutions purporting to announce the resignation of the existing management team and the appointment of one or more conspirators as new officers and directors of the companies.

The conspirators used their control over the hijacked shell companies to issue fraudulent press releases and filings designed to fraudulently inflate and "pump up" the price of the hijacked companies' stock. The defendants then sold or "dumped" their stock at the fraudulently inflated prices.

The defendants each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud before Senior Judge David S. Doty in U.S. District Court. Rajkaran entered his guilty plea Oct. 7. Saeid Jaberian, 59, of Hopkins, has pleaded not guilty to conspiracy, securities fraud and wire fraud charges.

This case is the result of an investigation conducted by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the FBI. The U.S. Attorney's Office thanks the Securities and Exchange Commission for its assistance on this matter.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph H. Thompson and Miranda E. Dugi are prosecuting the case.

SHORTAGES

From Page A1

The district is trying to alleviate the issue somewhat by ordering nearly a month in advance.

"Now, if something does not come in, I have time to look for another product," Buell said. "I will always be able to feed the kids - a parent never has to worry about that. Whether or not it is exactly what is on the menu is another story."

Finding other products creates new problems, however. For example, the state has strict guidelines on what can be served in schools for nutritional purposes, with limits on the amount of calories, trans fat and sodium a child can have per meal.

"We know, for example, how much sodium is in an order of chicken nuggets," Buell said. "Thus, we plan the rest of the day's menu around that so we stay in the correct guidelines. When those specific chicken nuggets are out and we

have to substitute in another brand, we then have to look at all the nutritionals and revamp the whole day's menu."

There is also the issue of allergens. The district's usual brand of chicken nuggets, for example, does not contain peanut oil or any other peanut byproducts. If Buell has to look elsewhere, they must adhere to that as well, and at times, this must be done for several products at a time.

Buell said that despite the issues, she and the district are "keeping our heads above water," but she does not expect the situation to change any time soon.

"Our vendor says it is going to get worse before it gets better," Buell said. "So we will continue to be proactive with our purchasing."

Supply chain issues aren't just a local issue. It's an issue that is hitting grocers and stores as well as schools. Many of the other issues faced in the Pine River-Backus and Pequot Lakes school districts are statewide or national issues as well.

"We have paraprofessional openings we're looking to fill, substitutes, custodial staff, kitchen staff. We've got a lot of creativity making sure our classrooms are covered."

JONATHAN CLARK, PR-B SUPERINTENDENT

In terms of transportation, interim Pequot Lakes Superintendent Kurt Stumpf said the district is doing all right at the moment, with no major staffing shortages to speak of. He did say the district is always on the lookout for substitute drivers for both buses and vans.

Likewise, rising fuel costs have not led to the district altering any programs or activities.

The PR-B School District has had a recurring shortage of bus drivers over the last couple of years. At the beginning of the school year the district was feeling the pinch of that shortage once again.

"We were one driver short for a while because of illness and vacations," said PR-B Superintendent Jonathan Clark. "We were working around

that, but I believe we should be getting everyone back."

Drivers have come out of the woodwork to fill open positions and now PR-B has that niche filled once again.

"We have actually been able to get a number of applicants," Clark said. "Now it's just moving them through the process."

The district is still accepting applications to guard against a staffing shortage. In addition, the district might need additional drivers occasionally for athletics and other activities.

"It's probably impacting more of our extracurricular activities to make sure we have transportation to all the games," Clark said.

Bus drivers need behind the wheel experience and a commercial driver's license while van drivers

don't need quite so many qualifications.

There are, however, some positions that are short staffed. Support positions are experiencing a shortage this year.

"We have paraprofessional openings we're looking to fill, substitutes, custodial staff, kitchen staff," Clark said. "We've got a lot of creativity making sure our classrooms are covered."

Clark said one of the district's principals has filled in in a classroom on at least one occasion. Some of the positions have not been hit hard; however, Clark said they would like more applicants to be safe.

"We want to make sure that we have an ample supply because right now that shortage can come at a moment's notice," Clark said.

A lingering issue for the Pequot Lakes School District is attracting substitute teachers. Stumpf said at the school board's Monday, Oct. 18, regular meeting that the district is

seeing roughly one-fourth of its substitute roles going unfilled - an improvement from last month but still considerably worse than in past years.

"Our staff is continuously going above and beyond to meet the needs of students and ensure efficient operations," Stumpf said. "Every day there are unfilled substitute positions, which means that other staff help cover while performing their normal duties. Anyone who is interested in subbing in any position should stop by the district office for more information."

At the meeting, the board approved an incentive plan that would see substitute teachers earn a \$100 bonus for every five days they work in the district for the remainder of the school year, as well as a \$50 bonus for staff members who refer a person to be a new substitute teacher in the district after that individual has worked five days in the district.



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