

PATRIOT PERSPECTIVE

Diamond in the rough

There are no mincing words; this has been a very difficult school year.

Students have faced significant challenges, and grades and mental health have suffered as a result. Teachers have been pushed to the breaking point with trying to teach in many different modes at once. Parents have tried to balance work responsibilities while trying to monitor their children's school progress and support as they are able.

What could possibly be said about this school year that went well?

Let's start with flexibility. This past fall, we made efforts at Pequot Lakes High School to create a means of providing education to our students by increasing the flexibility for how and when that education happened. It was not flawless and has developed considerably over the course of this school year.

However, we discovered ways to make school more flexible for students and families by creating systems that allow students to access their classroom and coursework without the restrictions of having to be seated in the classroom or be online live with the teacher.

Students are using that flexibility to take advantage of opportunities to schedule school around family commitments, illness or even apprenticeship opportunities that would not have been available even one year ago due to how school was conducted.

Then there is online learning. While full-time distance learning has created its fair share of problems, online learning has changed how students learn. Forty years ago, learning happened in school and

homework at home. Now students are able to access their teachers, learning materials, support and curriculum at any time of the day.

This has allowed us to redesign what happens in the classroom with a teacher. Classroom time has become a space for discussions, collaboration, activities and projects that were never possible when every day was needed to provide content.

Kids these days ... you can probably finish that sentence, but would it surprise you that one of the celebrations we share at PLHS is the manners and respect shown by our students? Teachers started noticing it last spring and it has become a regular occurrence: Students would sign off their online classes by thanking the teacher and wishing them a good day.

Not just a few students either. It has become commonplace and teachers have noticed the appreciation they feel from students, especially when they returned to in-person learning.

We are looking forward to school after COVID. There are some things we miss: pep fests, fans at games, plays, concerts and crowded hallways. But, it has not been all bad.

School will not look the same as it did in 2019, and that is not a bad thing. Being able to take school with you as you take a family vacation or recover from a surgery and still keep up in classes is now a possibility. Making it possible to attend school and work around other commitments is a good development.

No more snow days? Well, maybe it's not ALL good.

Aaron Nelson is Pequot Lakes High School principal.



AARON NELSON

Submitted photo
Don Stevens installed a small lending library at the Foothills Christian Academy in Backus on March 15.

BACKUS BOOK BOX

School is site of a lending library

By Travis Grimler
Staff Writer

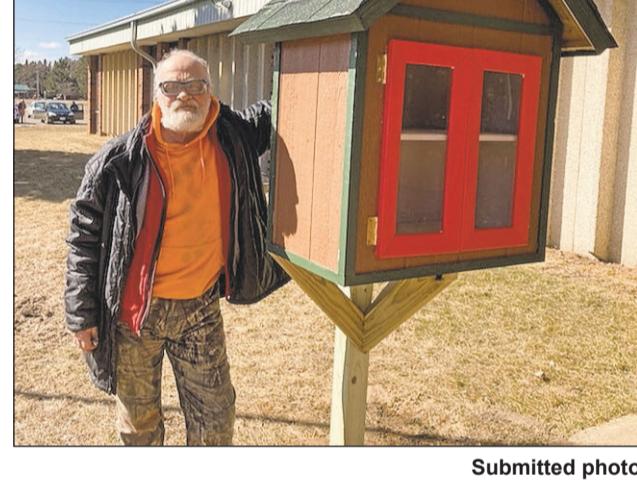
The former Backus School, now Foothills Christian Academy, is the host of a small lending library.

Donna Chastain, first, second and third grade teacher with Foothills Christian Academy, thought the school and city residents could use a library.

"I haven't really seen that many," Chastain said. "I've just heard of other people on social media putting them in their yards. It's great for neighborhoods that don't have a library and neighborhoods that are walkable. That fits Backus pretty well, so I just thought it would be a nice thing to have so people could get more books to read."

There are other lending libraries in the area, including some east of Highway 371 or at Bites Grill & Bar in Pine River, but this is the first that Chastain knows about inside the city of Backus.

There have been several contributors to the idea, including Don Stevens, of Emily.



Submitted photo
Don Stevens installed a small lending library at the Foothills Christian Academy in Backus on March 15.

Stevens, a staff member and administrator at the school, constructed the box for the books.

For now the two-shelf box has been filled with children's books from the attached thrift store, Threads for Ed. Eventually there should be more books appropriate for older readers.

At this and other lending libraries, the policy is generally to

leave a book in exchange for the book you borrow. The new Backus Book Box is fortunate to be able to replace books if they are not returned thanks to the thrift store.

The box was installed Thursday, March 25, and opened the same day. It's located at the school's south entrance.

Travis Grimler may be reached at 218-855-5853 or travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com. Follow him on Facebook and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/@PEJ_Travis.

Kindergarten roundup 6-6:30 p.m.

Organizers ask that attendance be limited to the kindergartner-to-be and a maximum of two other people to avoid any overcrowding. All in attendance will need to wear a face covering.

Kindergarten roundup is an important rite of passage for each student. It is an opportunity to check out the school building, meet the teachers, see the classrooms, climb on a school bus, talk with the school nurse and test out the playground equipment.

Those with kindergartners who are not yet

registered for the fall may attend the roundup to receive paperwork for registration. The event is also open for those interested in open enrollment, those with questions about the school and anyone wanting information on how to prepare.

Those unsure which school their child will attend may check the website at www.isd181.org. Find "Transportation" under the "Departments" tab and click on the link to check their attendance zone. Or call the Welcome Center at 218-454-6900 with any questions.

CLC to bring back in-person activities this coming fall

Administrators at Central Lakes College announced the return of an array of experiences this fall, including in-person learning, athletics and many other on-campus student activities.

"While we will always prioritize the health and safety of the college community, we are confident in our decision to return to a better than normal fall semester," CLC President Hara Charlier said in a news release. "We have been safely learning in person throughout the entire pandemic. We understand that our students need not only a vibrant, in-person college experience, but also the flexibility of virtual access to manage their busy lives. This fall, students will have both."

CLC will offer extensive in-person courses and opportunities to engage, while retaining the flexibility that virtual courses and services offer.

Students will continue to choose how they want to learn, whether it be fully in person, online or somewhere in between.

Additionally, students will continue to have access to in-person services, food service on campuses, student life activities, athletics and cultural and performing arts events. Those who wish to engage virtually will continue to have access to these and the many other activities that are part of the CLC experience.

Returning to an improved normal will look similar to the school's pre-pandemic state, with added flexibility and all health and safety measures recommended by public health experts.

"You will receive a vibrant college experience this fall," Charlier said. "We look forward to seeing you on our campuses."

St. Francis Catholic School raises more than \$60,000

Students, faculty and families of St. Francis Catholic School in Brainerd raised \$60,000 through the Catholic Schools Raffle program from Jan. 15-Feb. 28.

Along with 81 other schools, St. Francis raised a combined total of \$1.49 million, which is a new record for the program.

St. Francis students sold \$5 raffle tickets as part of the fundraising program that has been provided free of charge by sponsor Catholic United Financial since 2009. St. Francis is one of 82 schools in Minnesota and the Dakotas involved in 2021.

Funds raised by participating schools like St. Francis are used to

enhance school programs and facilities, including funding field trips, building playgrounds, supplementing tuition costs and providing new education technology.

Video, photos and a list of prize winners and results are available at www.catholicunitedfinancial.org/raffle.

Area CLC students earn scholarships

The Central Lakes College Foundation awarded \$325,000 in scholarships to 420 students, including the following area students:

Crosslake

Howard Myers and Roselle Johnson received scholarships from the CLC Automotive Scholarship Fund and Charles Stevens Fund.

East Gull Lake

Daniel Johnson, Amanda Olson and Brennan Hart received scholarships from the Erma Feriancek Fund, Jean Porwoll Fund and Robert Danzl Memorial Endowment.

Fifty Lakes

Ashley Moser received scholarships from the Pat & Dee Sprenger LPN Scholarship Fund and Brainerd Fire Department Relief Association Fund.

Hackensack

Richard Zwack received a scholarship from the CLC Automotive Scholarship Fund.

Merrifield

Tigerlily Bass received scholarships

from the Hazelle Caroll Fezler Scholarship Fund and Evelyn Matthies Art Scholarship Fund.

Nisswa

Mindy Chandler and Amanda Roettger received scholarships from the Bert & Gladys Caswell Memorial Scholarship and Jean Porwoll Fund.

Pequot Lakes

Katlyn Ostendorf, Jason Mackey, Drue Gibbons, Alyse Brockway, Jeanne Wynn, Meghan McConville, Kylie Wolkenhauer, Colona Wilson and Kyle Teich received scholarships from the August T. Boberg Scholarship Fund, Wayne & DeEtta Sorenson Fund, Consolidated Telecommunications Company (CTC) Scholarship Fund, Jean Porwoll Fund, Pat & Dee Sprenger Scholarship Fund, Pine River Rotary STRIVE Scholarship, Hunt Family Scholarship and Anderson Brothers Construction Scholarship Fund.

Pine River

Brianna Malz and Jackson Brennan received scholarships from the Jean Porwoll Fund and Anderson Brothers Construction Scholarship Fund.