

CROSSLAKE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

School board approves leadership plan

3 employees
to step up

By **Dan Determan**
Staff Writer

Following the departures of executive director Cliff Skagen and director of online learning Stacy Bender, the Crosslake Community School Board

conducted a special meeting online via Zoom on Thursday, March 18, establishing an interim leadership plan. The plan centers around three current employees stepping up to take on leadership responsibilities: online school counselor Holly Amaya, director of seat-based learning Jill Arendt and seat-based grades 3 and 4 teacher Annette Klang. “All of these individuals

have experience well beyond the roles that they are currently in,” board chair Cinda Jensen said. Skagen resigned from his position on Friday, March 12. As of the same time, Bender is no longer employed with the school. No more information regarding their departures has been made available. “I continue to recognize that there is a range of emo-

tions,” Jensen told the board, staff and public during the meeting. “We have had two employees who have parted from CCS, and that is a loss. I recognize that and I want to honor where everybody’s at in that process.” Under the approved interim plan, Klang will be in charge of the day-to-day running of the school, and will also handle disciplinary matters,

paraprofessional scheduling and reports to the Minnesota Department of Education. Her current teaching position will be handled by a long-term substitute teacher. Amaya’s responsibilities will continue to center on online learning, but will now handle admissions and enrollment, **PLAN:** Page 12

And the winner is: Food shelf patrons



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

Lakes Area Food Shelf board member Cindy Lubke (far right) lugs boxes into the food shelf building as they are delivered by parishioners at Grace United Methodist Church and Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, both in Pequot Lakes, on Tuesday, March 23.

2 Pequot Lakes churches compete to raise donations

By **Travis Grimler**
Staff Writer

Our Savior’s Lutheran Church barely beat Grace United Methodist Church in pounds of food donated to the Lakes Area Food Shelf in Pequot Lakes. The two Pequot Lakes churches held a challenge to raise food and money for the food shelf, with the “losing”

church hosting an ice cream social for the other congregation when the weather gets nice. Our Savior’s raised 604.2 pounds of food to Grace United’s 598.8 pounds. However, Our Savior’s took a wide lead in dollars donated with \$11,000.09 to Grace United’s \$4,359.35. Both church pastors agreed, however, that the Lakes Area Food Shelf patrons are the real winners when the totals were

tallied Tuesday morning, March 23, at the food shelf. “Even as we were adding our stuff up we said there was a really strong possibility Our Savior’s was going to beat us,” said Grace United Methodist Church Pastor Jennifer Matthees. “We were so proud of what we had done, and we said if **PATRONS:** Page 12



Submitted Photo

The Backus Wolverines trashed the Hackensack Huskies during a Sept. 2, 1941, football game with the score of 25-0.

Wolverines shut out Huskies: Backus 25, Hackensack 0

1941 football
game relived
with research

By **Travis Grimler**
Staff Writer

The Friday, Sept. 26, game against the Hackensack Huskies was a running game for the Backus Wolverines, who charged to victory with only two passes on their home turf. Running back Roy Bickle, a sophomore in the class of 1943, was a force to be reckoned with as the Huskies could not stop him in

a 40-yard sprint to the end zone. Bickle scored two touchdowns against the Huskies, sharing the spotlight with fullback Benny Wade, a junior in the class of 1942, who ran in two, with an extra point bringing the tally to 25 for the Wolverines and 0 for the Huskies. Hackensack suffered from a weak running game; and out of 15 passes, only three were complete and none made it to the end zone. Howard Ellis proved a major force in locking down the Huskies’ running game, having a hand in almost **WOLVERINES:** Page 6

Backus woman who embezzled funds from dental office is sentenced

A 61-year-old Backus woman who pleaded guilty to embezzling more than \$100,000 from a Pine River dental office was sentenced Monday, March 15, in Cass County District Court on felony theft of diverting funds from Pine River Dental Arts. According to court



Kelley

documents, Sandra Jean Kelley said she stole the money to support her gambling and shopping habits. Kelley, who was charged Sept. 25, 2020, pleaded guilty

to the theft before being sentenced. Judge Jana M. Austad ordered a stay of imposition on her sentence, which includes Kelley serving 60 days in Cass County Jail, being placed on supervised probation for five years and paying a \$795 fine. Kelley has until March 29 to report to jail and,

once she has served her 60 days, the conditions of her supervised release include not having contact with the victims, not possessing firearms or ammunition, not voting and she must complete a gambling assessment. According to the criminal complaint, the CEO of Pine River Dental Arts

discovered discrepancies leading her to believe Kelley, the former office manager, mishandled company funds. When Kelley was employed, she was the only employee who oversaw the office financial duties, including payroll and accounts receivable. A Cass County sheriff

investigator spoke with Kelley, who admitted she stole from her former employer, that it had been going on since 2013 and she did it to support her gambling and shopping habits. Kelley stated she paid her personal credit card with **FUNDS:** Page 12

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FUNDS

From Page 1

company funds.

The CEO claimed Kelley took extra hours through payroll and took cash from the company account for personal use. The CEO reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic office shutdown, she began to examine the business' records and discovered that between Oct. 9, 2017, and March 31, 2020, Kelley used the corporate checking account to pay \$84,633.08 off her personal credit card, the complaint stated.

She also discovered Kelley paid for her personal cell phone bill with a corporate credit card on March 30, 2020, in the amount of \$852.24.

The CEO reviewed the payroll records and compared

them with office records and discovered that between Sept. 24, 2015, and March 9, 2020, Kelley overpaid herself \$44,587.65, the complaint stated. The CEO said after comparing business records with cash deposits at the bank, that between Sept. 24, 2015, and March 31, 2020, Kelley took over \$80,878.16 in cash.

The complaint further stated Kelley's daughter-in-law also worked for the business from 2013-2019 as a patient coordinator. The CEO reported records showed Kelley overpaid her daughter-in-law as an employee by \$27,908.91 between Sept. 24, 2015, and Sept. 5, 2019. Kelley asserted her daughter-in-law was completely unaware that she modified her payroll. The daughter-in-law reported she had no idea anything was wrong with her paychecks.

PLAN

From Page 1

personalized study and withdrawing/student dropout conferences, among other duties. She will also field general high school questions.

Arendt will have responsibilities in both seat-based and online learning, fielding general questions for elementary and middle school students and parents while also helping with online staff supervision and evaluation, hiring, marketing, budgeting and building community between the two programs.

Arendt and Amaya are expected to communicate with each other on a frequent basis.

Both Arendt and Klang were finalists for the executive director position when Skagen was hired in December 2019.

With regard to the school's



Skagen

leadership plan moving forward, Jensen indicated that the process of hiring a more permanent leadership is in motion, but will take time.

"We are not going to rush our long-term leadership plan," Jensen said. "We want to conduct a rigorous process to understand and analyze these needs, student enrollment and demographics, possible leadership options and a thorough candidate selection process to select the most ideal candidates for potential roles. We do not have a plan all figured out right now. We want to review data. We want to receive staff and additional input and we must get board approval for several items."

Attempts to reach board

members for further comment on the departures of Skagen and Bender have been unsuccessful. Late last week, Joe Aliperto, president of Dieci School Finance in Roseville, said via email that he is fielding all questions on the board's behalf as board members are not doing any interviews.

Aliperto said he would take questions and coordinate with board members on any written responses they wished to issue. The Echo Journal hadn't yet received written responses to submitted questions as of Tuesday, March 23.

Aliperto said he has been working with Crosslake Community School for more than 10 years as both financial adviser and human resources specialist.

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PATRONS

From Page 1

they can do better than that, what an incredible win for the food shelf. What an incredible win for the community."

"March is the month where I think they thought any money that's brought in is matched," said Our Savior's Lutheran Church Pastor Stephen Blenkush. "So our \$10,000-plus all of a sudden becomes \$20,000. And the food shelf can buy far more food than we ever could even if we went to Costco. So, yeah, the food shelf will benefit and the folks from the community who are dependent on the food shelf are going to be the winners in all this."

The two congregations agreed to compete for the most donations for two purposes. One was to help

the Lakes Area Food Shelf during Minnesota FoodShare Month when donations go further and help determine what the shelf will receive from various organizations throughout the year.

They were also hoping to increase and strengthen interaction and cooperation between different congregations in the community.

"I had met with Pastor Stephen and we both mentioned that when you first join a new church the first thing you hear from the search committee is that they want to see a collaboration between pastors," Matthees said. "You hear that mentioned, but you don't really see it in a lot of communities."

Matthees was impressed with how her congregation handled complications from the coronavirus pandemic.

"With COVID, people are just starting to come back to churches," Matthees said.

"To see people rally around this felt like it was a good thing to be doing at this time. We were unsure in the start with numbers not being what we are used to."

Blenkush hopes the ice cream social will serve as another opportunity to interact.

"The other thing that I think is really important and valuable is that this is an event with two churches in town that otherwise probably had not been involved with anything together before," Blenkush said. "So I think we're all looking forward to that day when we can have that ice cream social and have folks from Grace United Methodist and Our Savior's get together and just build a little bit more sense of community."

"We're looking forward to that as a way to really start to build more friendships and relationships together," Matthees said. "I was hoping maybe not to just have the



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

Lakes Area Food Shelf Interim Director Tim Moore gets donation totals from Our Savior's Lutheran Church Pastor Stephen Blenkush and Grace United Methodist Church outreach team member Peggy Johnson on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at the food shelf building in Pequot Lakes.

ice cream and party thing, but maybe we can do a hymn sing or something simple to see the ways that we really are one people and kind of

on the same page."

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.

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