

PATRIOT OFFICE
763-275-0275
14054 Bank Street,
Box 458, Becker, MN 55308

The Patriot is the official newspaper for Clear Lake, Clearwater, Orrock, Palmer & Santiago Townships, City of Becker, Becker Township and Becker School District #726, City of Big Lake and Big Lake School District #727. The Patriot is also the legal newspaper for the Sherburne County financials.

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Call 763-275-0275 or send an email to legals@patriotnewsmn.com

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Wednesday 11am Legals & Notices, Wednesday 10am Display & Classified Ads.

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Check out each week's content at our website: www.patriotnewsmn.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
The Patriot welcomes letters to the editor. Call 763-275-0275 or email Bill at reporter.bill@patriotnewsmn.com. Addresses and phone numbers are required for verification purposes.
The deadline for all letters is 11am Wednesday. Limit letters to 200 words or less. Letters will be printed at the discretion of the Editor and are subject to editing for grammar, libel and brevity. Two letters per writer per subject each year.

OBITUARIES:
Obituaries are \$75 prepaid. The Editor reserves the right to edit lengthy obituaries.

BUSINESS HOURS:
• Mon. - Wed. 8am to 5pm,
• Thurs. 8am to 3pm
• Friday CLOSED

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
\$100 annually,
\$50 for six months,
\$25 for three months or \$9 a month.

SUBMITTED MATERIAL:
There will be a \$50 charge for all thank you, engagement, wedding and birth announcement pictures. The Patriot is not responsible for correctness of ads received by telephone.

emr

VISIT OUR STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY IN BECKER, MINNESOTA

NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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- Aluminum cans
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INSERTS

- Menards (All Zips)
- Runnings (All Zips)



ZIMMERMAN GIRL FOUND, KIDNAPPER CAPTURED, CHARGES FILED

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

A press conference was held at the Sherburne County Emergency Operations Center inside the Government Center on Thurs., Jan. 22, to inform the public about the ongoing investigation of a missing seven-year-old girl from Zimmerman. It was announced that the girl, who had been abducted 16 hours earlier, had been found.

Joseph Andrew Bragg, a 28-year-old from International Falls, had been arrested and taken into custody around 12:34 a.m. Thursday morning in Albert Lea.

The press conference, scheduled to begin at 10:30 a.m., attracted reporters from local television and print media. At 10:42 a.m., officials from the FBI, Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Elk River Police Dept., and Sherburne County Attorney's Office entered the room. Commander Ben Zawacki of the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office initially took to the podium to address reporters.

Details provided

Zawacki provided details of the abduction and explained the delay in issuing an Amber Alert, explaining that the initial missing child call was received at 6:31 p.m. by Sherburne Co. Sheriffs. After



SHERBURNE COUNTY COMMANDER BEN ZAWACKI at the podium, addressed the media last week following the kidnapping of a seven-year-old girl. Above, Bragg's booking photo. (Patriot Photo by Don Bellach)

speaking with the family and neighbors, a call to 911 went out. Deputies, investigators, and fire, responded to the area.

Calling the scene chaotic, Zawacki said numerous tips had been received, including one about a black car, which was later found not to be involved. An Integrated Public Alert (IPAWS) was issued to aid in the search and rescue operation, but at that time, the criteria for issuing an Amber Alert were not met. From the information received, police had a potential suspect, a vehicle, and his general location

identified. A Keep Our Police Safe alert (KOPS) was issued coordinating with law enforcement in Albert Lea. They waited to issue the alert for fear of notifying the subject. The amber alert was issued after law enforcement agents were in a position to apprehend the subject. Shortly before 1 a.m., Sherburne Co. was notified that Joseph Bragg was taken into custody and that the girl was safe and taken to the hospital for evaluation.

Appreciation Stated

Zawacki thanked the numerous law enforcement and first responders from

local, state, and federal agencies that assisted in the investigation.

"We estimate around 200 law enforcement officers and fire personnel assisted in some way last night," he said. "I also want to thank the community. An estimated 700 volunteers came out in the sub-zero temperatures to assist in trying to locate (the girl). Without that assistance, and the assistance of all of our partners, and the diligent work by the investigators, I don't believe we would have come out with this outcome."

Superintendent of the

BCA Drew Evans also highlighted the community's involvement, commending their response. We want to make sure that everybody across MN continues to do just what we saw in this community today. When a child goes missing, we come together."

Sherburne County Attorney Dawn Nyhus said that her office would be reviewing the case and would release more information as it becomes available.

Charges Filed

Later that day, two

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Zawacki announces candidacy for Sherburne County Sheriff

Submitted Article

Ben Zawacki, a 19-year veteran of the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office and current Commander of Operations, announced today (Jan. 27) that he is running for Sherburne County Sheriff in the 2026 election.

"I am honored to announce my candidacy for Sherburne County Sheriff," Zawacki said. "Every position I've held has prepared me to lead this department. Sheriff (Joel) Brott's leadership has built a strong foundation, and I am committed to continuing that work with integrity, transparency, and accountability."

Zawacki was hired in Sherburne County as a Patrol Deputy and has risen through several promotions, spending the past three years overseeing all operational functions of the Sheriff's Office, working closely with Sheriff Brott and department leadership.

A 1996 graduate of Becker High School, Zawacki and his wife, Amanda, are the parents of twin daughters, Mya and Macy.

"This community has shaped my career and my commitment to public service," Zawacki said. "Serving and protecting the people of Sherburne County has been my life's work. With the training, experience, and dedication I've developed over the past two decades, I am ready to lead the Sheriff's Office forward and continue earning the trust of the community."

Brott endorsed Zawacki as his successor, citing Zawacki's leadership, integrity, and deep experience within the Sheriff's Office. Brott announced last week that he will retire at the end of his current term after 18 years as Sheriff.

"Ben Zawacki is the right leader to continue serving Sherburne County,"



SHERBURNE COUNTY COMMANDER OF OPERATIONS, Ben Zawacki recently announced he plans to run for Sherburne County Sheriff following Joel Brott's decision to retire. (Submitted Photo).

Brott said. "He understands this department, this community, and the responsibility that comes with the badge. I trust him to lead with professionalism, accountability, and a commitment to public safety."

Zawacki began his law enforcement career after graduating from the Alexandria Technical College Law Enforcement Program in 2000. He served part-time with the Becker Police Department before joining the Princeton Police Department full-time in 2001. In 2006, he joined the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, where he has served in a wide range of roles, including Patrol Deputy, School Resource Officer, Drug Task Force Investigator and Supervisor, Investigative Sergeant, Patrol Sergeant, Emergency Response Unit Team Leader, Investigative Captain, and most recently, Commander of Operations.

Zawacki said he looks forward to meeting with residents across the county throughout the campaign and earning their support in the 2026 election.



THE BECKER AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE held their annual meeting last week at Pebble Creek Golf course. Newly elected board member is Cole Steil (Steil Insurance) who is replacing outgoing board member Ron Mumm (Steil Insurance). Along with presenting their current budget for 2026 and updates on the various committees, various awards were also handed out. Chamber members voted and awards were given to Josh Otto (Regal Creek Wealth Management) for Ambassador of the Year; Tracie Hogrefe (Charlie's Sports Bar & Grill) for Business of the Year; and Lynn Krueth (Options Inc.) for Member of the Year. (Patriot Photo by Carol Hanson).

BL residents want playground restored

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

The results of Big Lake's citywide Mitchell Farms Park Survey were discussed by the Parks Advisory Committee on Mon., Jan. 27, 2026.

During the meeting, the board voted to approve a motion recommending to the council that further discussion be held regarding the Mitchell Farms Park survey results and a timeline for replacing park amenities at Mitchell Farms Park. The motion was approved unanimously. Chair Doug Pederson and Board Member Jeff Webster were absent.

Upcoming Action

Streets, Parks, and Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels, who advised on the motion, informed board members that March would be the earliest the council could take up the discussion



KAMERON HANSON, Megan Weber, Scott Creighton, Norm Michels, Deb Wegeleben. Not facing the camera - Kim Noding and Lisa Odens. (Patriot photo by Don Bellach)

during its scheduled workshop. He explained that the construction of the new Public Safety Facility and a proposed new Wastewater Treatment Facility were the council's priorities, though he would try to fit it in.

Michels also said the new council meeting schedule made it more difficult to add new items to the agenda, an assertion

Finance Director Deb Wegeleben agreed with.

Survey results

Two-hundred and fifty-nine people took part in the survey, 236 of whom were residents of Big Lake. Almost half of those residents live within a half

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Times Change

I've spent the last 30+ years at my hometown church on Christmas Eve participating in their candlelight service. It's always been such a peaceful, faith-filled time. Sadly, this past Christmas Eve service was the last that will be held there.

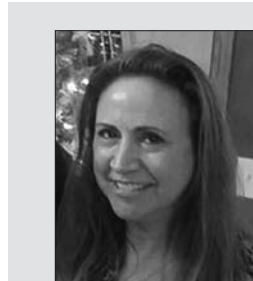
Trinity Lutheran Church in Wendell, MN has been a part of my family's life since before I was born. Established in 1905, my Dad was baptized there, my Mom and Dad were both confirmed there, and it was the site of their wedding 58 years ago.

Following tradition, I was also baptized there (wearing my Dad's handmade baptismal gown), confirmed there, and married there. Through the age of 18 I spent most Sundays there participating in services and attending Sunday School. Sitting in the creaky balcony and taking notes of the sermons during my confirmation years.

All three of my children were baptized there, also wearing their grandpa's baptismal gown.

The doors to the church were never locked during my childhood, and my sister and I would sneak in the back door and eat dill pickle slices out of the big jars that were always in the refrigerator.

Every Sunday its pews were full of people. But times change. The town of Wendell, never large, has now dwindled down to less than 200 people. Unless you're a farmer, there aren't a lot of jobs in the area and most young people move



By Penny Leuthard
Contributing Writer

away. The town's senior citizens pass on. There's barely anyone left to fill its pews anymore.

It's a testament to the dedicated congregation that Trinity managed to stay open as long as it has. A few wealthy families and a minister who came out of retirement to serve held it together for the last 20 or so years.

Trinity is known for the enormous, two story stained glass windows on its east and west walls. I can't imagine not sitting in one of its pews and watching the sunlight shine through them.



Driving in to Wendell from the east the church is the first thing you see. Now it's closed and will be demolished sometime in the near future. I can't image it not being there.

How do you say goodbye to something that's been a part of your entire life? Although I don't live there any longer and only attended services on Christmas Eve, I still consider it my home church.

But times change.

Gratitude

Today (Jan. 22), I want to thank first responders, law enforcement, volunteers, and community members throughout Minnesota after the safe recovery of a missing 7-year-old Zimmerman girl early this morning.

In a time that has been difficult for so many Minnesotans, yesterday our community showed the very best of who we are—neighbors helping neighbors, and courage in the face of uncertainty. I want to thank the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, local and neighboring law enforcement agencies, fire departments, emergency responders, and every volunteer who stepped forward to help bring this child home.

As word of the missing child spread, the response from the community was overwhelming. At one point during the search, the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office reported that "we have more volunteers than we need," reflecting the outpouring of support from Zimmerman and surrounding communities.

After the child was found, the Zimmerman/Livonia Fire District shared that responders "went door to door and canvassed every feasible area," noting that



By Rep.
Paul Novotny

they were joined by hundreds of volunteers. "Some walked. Others drove. All showed up," the department stated.

One volunteer summed up the spirit of the effort, saying:

"We didn't need to know her. As responders, parents, and neighbors, we refused to stop until she was found."

That statement says everything. This was a coordinated, compassionate response that truly shows the strength of Minnesota's public safety professionals and the people they serve.

Rep. Novotny expressed his gratitude to all agencies and individuals involved and emphasized the importance of continued cooperation between law enforcement and the public during emergency situations.

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mile of the park and were between the ages of 35-54.

Among Big Lake residents, when asked how important it was to have playground equipment in Mitchell Farms Park, 65% answered very important, and another 15% said it was important.

When asked what new amenities they would like to see added to Mitchell Farms Park, 77% said they would like new playground equipment. 64% said they were very likely or likely to support funding for new amenities at Mitchell Farms Park.

The city received 120 comments, many expressed displeasure with how the decision to remove the existing equipment was made, while others worried about city spending and high property taxes.

One disappointed resident wrote, "I used this park when I was a kid; now I have a one-year-old. We were looking forward to play(ing) on it more as she gets the skills needed to use it."

To view the full results of the survey, go to the city's website and click on "Agendas & Minutes." Scroll to Parks Advisory Board and download the agenda for the January 26 meeting or follow this link: https://www.biglakemn.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_01262026-1215. The survey begins on page nine.

Eastern Screech-Owls

A cavity in a tree, excavated by a woodpecker seems normal enough, but when you stop to think about it, this simple cavity in a tree is absolutely remarkable. So, let's take a closer look at the humble woodpecker cavity.

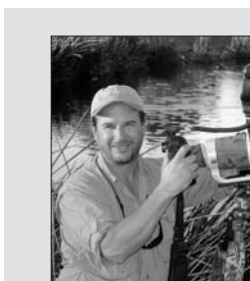
According to the IOC (International Ornithological Committee) there are 241 species of woodpecker in the world. Here in America, we have 22 species of woodpecker, ranging from the small Downy Woodpecker to the giant Pileated Woodpecker. All these woodpeckers have one thing in common; they all excavate cavities to use for nesting. Because of this, woodpeckers are considered

primary cavity nesting birds. In other words, woodpeckers are the primary users of the cavities that they excavate, however there are an estimated 75-80 species of non-woodpeckers that also rely on these cavities to nest. These birds are called secondary cavity nesters, and their very existence depends upon woodpeckers. In a study published in 2017 found that nearly 20% of all birds' species in the world rely on cavities in trees, for either roosting or nesting.

Most woodpeckers only use the cavities that they excavate for just one brood of young birds. Woodpeckers excavate in dead or dying trees with just a few exceptions. Live trees / wood are too dense and hard for the woodpeckers to excavate. Over the life span of the cavity, it may host dozens of families of baby birds from a wide variety of secondary cavity nesters.

Depending upon the woodpecker species, or how soft the wood, it takes anywhere from four to twenty days for a pair of woodpeckers to excavate a cavity. I say "a pair" because both the male and female do the work. It all depends upon the level of decay in the wood. Obviously the softer the wood the faster it goes. Only a small handful of woodpecker species excavate cavities in live trees. The overwhelming majority are excavated in dead trees or dead limbs of live trees.

In the world of woodpeckers, parenting duties are shared by both adults. Cavities are excavated by both male and female, but the male does slightly more work. When it comes to incubation, the female does most



By Naturalist
Stan Tekiela

incubating during the day, and the male does the night shift. After they young hatch, both parents bring food to the begging babies.

So many of our most beloved birds such as Eastern Bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds, and raptors such as American Kestrels and Screech-owls are dependent upon large woodpecker cavities. In one recent study, it showed that of all the cavities found in a forest, only 10 percent of the natural cavities were being used, but 80 percent of the old woodpecker's cavities were utilized by secondary cavity nesting birds.

I think many people do not realize that many waterfowl species such as Hooded Merganser, Wood ducks and Buffleheads also depend upon cavities in trees to nest. So far, I have been concentrating on nesting and haven't considered the value of woodpecker cavities for roosting at night. Many species of birds who don't use cavities for nesting will use a nest cavity for a place to be safe and warm when roosting, especially on long cold winter nights. Many studies show the benefits of roosting inside cavities compared to being out on a tree branch, which leaves them vulnerable to nocturnal predators such as owls.

And speaking of owls, all the species of Screech-owls also use woodpecker cavities to nest and also roost, except they roost during the day. All of this was running through my head the other day while I was capturing some images and video of a wonderful Eastern Screech-owl who was enjoying a little sunshine on a cold winter day in the northland. Until next time...

Stan Tekiela is an author / naturalist and wildlife photographer who travels the U.S. to study and capture images of wildlife. He can be followed on www.facebook.com and www.instagram.com. He can be contacted via his web page at www.naturesmart.com.

SECTION 11 B ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS BIG LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION RENOVATION 6 MINNESOTA AVENUE BIG LAKE, MINNESOTA 55309

Independent School District #727 will receive single prime sealed bids for Big Lake Middle School 2026 Special Education Renovation until 2:00 P.M. local time on February 19, 2026 at the District Office - Entrance J, 701 Minnesota Avenue, Big Lake, Minnesota 55309, at which time and place all bids will be publicly opened and read aloud.

Bidding documents, including the Proposal Form, Drawings and Specifications, will be on file at the Minnesota Builders Exchange; McGraw Hill Construction/Dodge Plan Center; Reed Construction; iSqFt Plan Room (St. Paul, MN), The Blue Book Building and Construction Network; and from PlanWell at https://order.e-arc.com/arcEOC/x_project.asp?de=BD64E838-3E99-4DC4-93BB-#CFB%20BBF%20

A pre-bid meeting will be held at Big Lake Middle School, 601 Minnesota Avenue, Big Lake Minnesota 55309 at 3:30pm on February 3, 2026. Visitors must check in at the main entrance with a valid State ID. Attendance at the meeting is not required, but highly recommended.

This project includes: Interior demolition of existing walls, ceilings, casework, and flooring. Building of new walls, ceilings, floors and finishes. Rearrangement of mechanical and electrical systems, associated with the architectural work.

American Reprographics Company, 4730 Park Glen Road, St. Louis Park, Minnesota 55416 (952) 697-8800, facsimile (952) 697-8803 will provide complete downloadable sets of the Bidding Documents to prospective bidders and subcontractors. The downloads will be available January 23, 2026. A deposit check in the amount of \$5 made out to ARC for each set downloaded via the internet at <https://www.e-arc.com/location/st-louis-park/> and clicking on the PlanWell icon, then the Public Plan Room icon, select Big Lake Middle School 2026 Special Education Renovation.

Make proposals on the bid forms supplied in the Project Manual. No oral, telegraphic or telephonic proposals or modifications will be considered. Submit with each bid, a certified check or acceptable bidder's bond payable to Independent School District #727 in an amount equal to five percent (5%) of the total bid. The successful bidder will be required to furnish satisfactory Labor and Material Payment Bond, and Performance Bond.

Bids may not be withdrawn within thirty (30) days after the scheduled time of opening bids, without the consent of the Owner. The Owner reserves the right to accept any bid or to reject any or all bids, or parts of such bids, and waive informalities or irregularities in bidding.

The Owner requires Substantial Completion of the project on or before August 14, 2026.

/s/ Terrence Zerwas| Director of Buildings and Grounds
Big Lake Schools
(Published in the Patriot: 01/24/26, 01/31/26.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

In the next elections, I ask everyone to consider electing people with morals and a sense of duty. Tom Emmer hasn't said one word against this illegal, unconstitutional, politically motivated, violent occupation. This is not "law enforcement". This is intentional provocation to try and prove we're a bunch of violent reactionaries. We are doing an amazing job proving them wrong. We're meeting their kidnappings, murder, and violence with peaceful demonstrations, community organizing, and imagination. I've never been more proud to be a Minnesotan. Keep the faith, keep it peaceful, and dump Tom Emmer.

Duncan Ryan
Becker, MN

TO THE EDITOR:

Previously, I wrote Rep. Emmer begging him to remember Minnesota values and use his influence with President Trump to change the course of his (Trump's) decisions. The response I got was thanks for supporting Trump which I clearly did not. I'm asking Rep. Emmer again to remember your Minnesota values. It appears you have pledged allegiance to a president and administration who cater to the wealthy and lie to the rest of us. Your daily Facebook posts demonstrate how out of touch you are with us. You misrepresent what is happening in your weekly columns. The violence you blame on our state officials is caused by your poorly trained ICE agents. Do the 1500 "worst of the worst" you boast ICE has arrested and detained include the high school DACA kids, five-year-olds or citizens? Reports indicate that 476 Habeas Corpus petitions on behalf of erroneous arrests of immigrants have been filed. The Department of Corrections refuted another lie. Convicted illegal alien criminals are turned over to ICE, not turned loose on Minnesota streets. I used to pray that you and this administration have a change of heart. I now pray for a change in leadership.

Joyce LeClaire
Big Lake, MN

TO THE EDITOR:

Emmer steps in line with whatever comes out of Donald Trump's mouth. He helped push the "Big Beautiful Bill", the most blatant theft of low and middle-income American wealth, through the House. He has cheered an emboldened administration as it claws back appropriations, ignores judges orders, slow-

walks the release of the Epstein files, and empowers ICE with carte blanche to send 3000 hastily-trained officers to our state. But they aren't getting just the worst of the worst: they are asking people for their papers (illegal), knocking down doors without warrants (illegal), shooting drivers when they try to drive away (illegal), and dog-piling legal observers and executing them in the cold morning light (illegal). This administration destroys so much good in the pursuit of its narrow-minded grievance-driven goals. Rep. Emmer, I call on you to stand up for decency and remember your oath to defend and protect the constitution. WE THE PEOPLE have eyes that see, we have hearts that break, we have votes we cast. Emmer has shown his loyalty, and it's not to Minnesota, but to power. History will judge. It's cold, I'm going to go use your column to get my wood stove going.

Curtis Weinrich
Clearwater, MN

TO THE EDITOR:

The Oath of Enlistment (for enlisted): "I, _____ do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God." These are not just words. We are watching the Constitution bend in real time. Reports show violations of the 1st, 4th, 5th, 10th, 14th, and now the 2nd Amendments. People in our country have been shot and killed while exercising the simple right to protest and document. One man was legally carrying a firearm, disarmed from behind, and then shot ten times. This isn't rumor. It's on video. If watching that doesn't stir fear or grief, it's worth asking what we've trained ourselves not to feel. And yet, members of our community still show up. Not because they're paid. Not because it's easy. But because it's terrifying but necessary. They stand for friends, neighbors, and rights that belong to ALL of us. If you believe these people are "the problem," pause. Would defending your neighbors, your rights, bring you pride or shame?

Vanessa Davenport
Big Lake, MN

NOTICE OF HEARING ON PROPOSED ASSESSMENT CITY OF CLEARWATER

SPRING STREET STORM SEWER IMPROVEMENTS

Notice is hereby given that the city council will meet at 7:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible on February 9, 2026, at Clearwater City Hall to consider and possibly adopt the proposed assessment for storm sewer improvements on Spring Street from Bittersweet Drive to the northerly dead-end of Spring Street. Adoption by the city council of the proposed assessment against abutting property may occur at the hearing.

Such assessment is proposed to be payable in equal annual installments of principal and interest extending over a period of 5 years, the first of the installments to be payable on or before the first Monday in January 2027 and will bear interest at the rate of 3.7 percent per annum from the date of the adoption of the assessment resolution.

The proposed assessment roll is on file for public inspection at the city administrator's office. The total amount of the proposed assessment is \$3,362. Written or oral objections will be considered at the meeting. No appeal to district court may be taken as to the amount of an assessment unless a written objection signed by the affected property owner is filed with the municipal clerk prior to the assessment hearing or presented to the presiding officer at the hearing. The city council may upon such notice consider any objection to the amount of a proposed individual assessment at an adjourned meeting upon such further notice to the affected property owners as it deems advisable.

An owner may, at any time prior to certification of the assessment to the county auditor, pay the entire assessment on such property, with interest accrued to the date of payment, to the City of Clearwater. No interest shall be charged if the entire assessment is paid within 30 days from the adoption of this assessment. You may at any time thereafter pay to Wright County the entire amount of the assessment remaining unpaid, with interest accrued to December 31 of the year in which such payment is made. Such payment must be made before November 15 or interest will be charged through December 31 of the succeeding year. If you decide not to prepay the assessment before the date given above, the rate of interest that will apply is 3.7 percent per annum. The right to partially prepay the assessment is available prior to certification of the assessment to the county auditor.

An owner may appeal an assessment to district court pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 429.081 by serving notice of the appeal upon the mayor or clerk of the city within 30 days after the adoption of the assessment and filing such notice with the district court within ten days after service upon the mayor or clerk.

/s/ Andrea Lawrence Wheeler, Mayor
ATTEST:

/s/ Annita M. Smythe, City Administrator
(Published in the Patriot: 01/24/26, 01/31/26.)

SECOND NOTICE

An aeration system creating open water and thin ice will begin operation on Ann Lake in Sherburne County, Orrock Township, T34.R27.S22 after February 1, 2026. Weather conditions may cause the areas of thin ice and open water to fluctuate greatly. Stay clear of the marked area.
(Published in the Patriot: 01/31/26).

AREA NEWS

AUCTIONS

••••• UPCOMING AUCTIONS •••••

**SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 1ST @ 11:00 AM**
ANTIQUES, MILITARY, HOUSEHOLD,
OUTDOOR & TOOLS

**SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 8TH @ 11:00 AM**
ANTIQUES, HOUSEHOLD, OUTDOOR & TOOLS

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DIRECTIONS: ST. CLOUD, E. ON HWY 23 LEFT ON 40TH (FOLLOW SIGNS)

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LIVE MUSIC

Captains Dave and Ben

Cruise Control

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8PM-MIDNIGHT**

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& build-your-own Bloody
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YOU'RE INVITED!

REGISTER HERE

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH
10 AM - 2 PM**

**BECKER FIELD HOUSE
13725 BRADLEY BLVD**

BRAGG from page 1

charges were filed against Bragg, one count for kidnapping and another for criminal sexual conduct. Bail has been set at \$4 million, and he remains in custody at the Sherburne County Jail.

New Details

New details emerged in the charging documents, including a connection between the family and suspect through social media. In December of 2025, Joseph Bragg contacted the mother via Facebook. She accepted his friend's request, believing that he was someone she knew. Red flags began to immediately emerge. Bragg began asking her if she had children. He expressed his desire to one day have children of his own and wanted to participate in activities with children. He also told her he worked in childcare and asked if anyone in the Zimmerman/Princeton area needed help.

The mother grew suspicious and eventually blocked him.

Charging documents also revealed that the white, 2025 Dodge Ram was a rental vehicle bearing Tennessee license number BSB3715. Law enforcement used cell phone data to track the suspect and later, the vehicle was spotted at a Trails Travel Center and Love's Truck Stop in Albert Lea. It was stopped as it pulled out onto Co. Rd. 46 by Albert Lea Police. The interior of the vehicle was packed with items, including a large suitcase, making it difficult to see the girl sitting in the back seat in a booster seat. Upon closer inspection, she was found to match the description of the missing girl. The suspect was then arrested.

Additional investigations revealed that Bragg had initially taken the girl to a residence near Hamel/Corcoran

before calling a Lyft to take him and the girl to the Ramada Inn in Plymouth to a room that had been reserved from December 27, 2025 to January 21, 2026. Hotel surveillance revealed Bragg entering the room alone, dragging a large suitcase. After 30 minutes, the suspect was seen leaving the room with the same suitcase.

The victim was forensically interviewed and revealed that she was in the hotel room with Bragg, with her clothes off, stating that he had put his "personal spot" on her bottom.

A search warrant was executed for the hotel room, and law enforcement located a number of items, including unused diapers.

Bragg will be arraigned at an upcoming hearing on Feb. 3, 2026 at 10:30 a.m.

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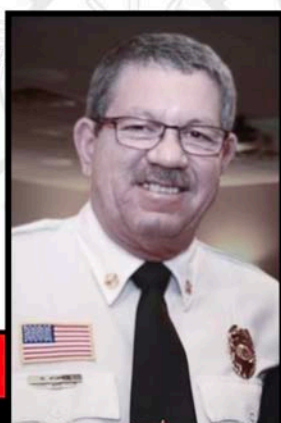
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Open House for Retired Chief Ron Koren

The public is invited to attend an Open House celebrating the retirement of Chief Ron Koren from the Clear Lake Fire Department.

Chief Koren has served with dedication for 48 years and is retiring after an outstanding career.



Open House

Sunday, February 8, 2026
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM | Palmer Township Hall

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PATRIOT

Attend DFL Precinct Caucuses February 3rd

You may ask, "What are precinct caucuses?" The caucuses are statewide grass roots political meetings run by Minnesota's political parties. They occur in even years throughout the state on a designated date. This year that date is Tuesday, February 3, 2026. For Democrats, any precinct resident who attests to being in the DFL may participate in their caucus and have their voice heard.

Each precinct meets to present and vote on issues of concern called resolutions, which may eventually become part of the state DFL Party Platform. They also vote on candidate preferences, choose precinct leaders, and elect delegates to represent them at the DFL conventions.

The caucus schedule is the same for every location in the state. **Registration begins at 6:30 pm. The caucus meetings begin at 7:00 and usually adjourn between 8:00 and 8:30 pm. If you can not attend caucuses but would like to participate, you can complete a non-attendee form at: www.dfl.org/caucus.** This site will also have instructions for submitting the form. If you aren't sure of your precinct, go to: caucusfinder.sos.mn.gov and enter your address.

Below are the locations for area Senate District 27 DFL caucuses and the precincts which meet at each site:

Becker - High School Commons, Door 11 (North Entrance)

7 precincts: Becker City, Becker Twp, Clear Lake City, Clear Lake Twp, Haven Twp P-2, Palmer Twp, Santiago Twp.

Big Lake - Middle School Student Center, Door B

7 precincts: Big Lake City P-1, P-2, P-3, Big Lake Twp P-1, P-2, P-3, Orrock Twp

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Becker dance getting ready for sections

By Maria Moore,
Contributing Writer

On Sat., Jan. 24, the Becker B-Squad and JV dance teams had their last competition of the year at Delano.

They ended on a high note with the team, parents, and staff agreeing that it was their best performance of the season.

Results included third place going to both B-Squad Jazz and JV Jazz. Fifth place going to Varsity Kick with their highest score of the year and JV Kick. Sixth place went to Varsity Kick.



THE VARSITY TEAM has been preparing themselves for the section tournament held at Sartell High School on January 31st at 1PM. Above is the team after competing at the Delano Invite. (Submitted Photo).

PUBLIC NOTICES

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS BECKER TOWNSHIP - SHIP-B OULDER CROSSING W/ ST SHERBURNE COUNTY, MN

Becker Township will be receiving electronic bids for the **Boulder Crossing West** project until **7 PM local time on February 17th, 2026**, on **QuestCDN.com**. The regular **Town Board meeting at 18 Hancock St, Becker, MN 55308** will be called to order at **7:00 pm** and approximately **7:01 PM**, bids results will be shown and read aloud.

Plans and Specifications may be examined at the office of Bogart, Pederson & Associates, Inc., 13076 First Street, Becker, MN 55308, or obtained by contacting William Tessmer, PE at wtessmer@bogart-pederson.com or 763-262-8822. Plans will also be available for download online at www.QuestCDN.com. **The cost to obtain a hard copy of the Plans & Specifications is \$0 with a \$0 mailing fee.**

The projects includes: milling and overlaying bituminous pavement, mailbox and sign replacement, and gravel shouldering. Make all bids on the bid form supplied in the specifications – no other proposal submissions will be considered. Bids must be accompanied by a Certified Check or Bidder’s Bond made payable to the Township as a proposal guarantee for **at least 5% of the amount of the bid**. No Bidder may withdraw their bid (which shall include the Certified Check or Bidder’s Bond) within 30 days after the scheduled closing time for the receipt of bids.

The Township will consider award of the contract at the **March 16th** meeting contingent upon Engineer’s review. It is the Township’s intent to begin and complete construction in the year **2026**. The Township reserves the right to reject any or all bids, or parts of such bids, and to waive informalities.

/s/ William H. Tessmer, P.E.

(Published in the *Patriot*: 01/24/26, 01/31/26.)

Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State Certificate of Assumed Name Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 333

The filing of an assumed name does not provide a user with exclusive rights to that name. The filing is required for consumer protection in order to enable customers to be able to identify the true owner of a business.

ASSUMED NAME: **ORGANIC**

PRAIRIE PROVISIONS

PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS: **12925 PROSPERITY AVE BECKER MN 55308 USA**
NAMEHOLDER(S):
Name: **TH Cattle Company, LLC**
Address: **12925 PROSPERITY AVE BECKER MN 55308 USA**

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both capacities. I further certify that I have completed all required fields, and that the information in this document is true and correct and in compliance with the applicable chapter of Minnesota Statutes. I understand that by signing this document I am subject to the penalties of perjury as set forth in Section 609.48 as if I had signed this document under oath.

SIGNED BY: **David J. Zubke**

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01/26/2026 11:59 PM

/s/ Steve Simon

Secretary of State

(Published in the *Patriot*: 01/31/26, 02/07/26).

SHERBURNE COUNTY NOTICE OF TAX-FORFEITED LAND INITIAL PUBLIC SALE

NOTICE IS HERBY GIVEN the parcels of land described herein shall be sold to the highest bidder at a public sale in accordance with M.S. Chapter 282 for no less than the estimated market value, as determined by the most recent assessment. Any properties that do not sell will be offered on a subsequent public sale. The minimum bid price for the subsequent sale will be the sum of all delinquent taxes, special assessments, penalties, interest, and costs assigned to the parcel. The Subsequent Action Minimum bid is subject to change due to ongoing interest, penalties and costs.

The County Auditor shall conduct the initial sale via online auction through Public Surplus starting on February 11, 2026, and closing on March 12, 2026, at 10:00am. The property listings will be available to preview on the Public Surplus website. The subsequent sale for unsold properties will start March 16th, 2026, and close March 31, 2026, at 10am.

PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	CITY/TOWNSHIP	Estimated MARKET VALUE	SUBSEQUENT ACTION MINIMUM BID
10-00417-0520	BIG LAKE TOWNSHIP	\$64,300.00	\$4,941.84
30-00403-0464	LIVONIA TOWNSHIP	\$7,200.00	\$712.83
35-004070135	ORROCK TOWNSHIP	\$4,200.00	\$456.48
60-00404-1120	CITY OF BECKER	\$1,600.00	\$155.08
75-00869-0030	CITY OF ELK RIVER	\$5,400.00	\$971.47

All property is sold “as is” and may not conform to local building and zoning ordinances. Sherburne County makes no warranty that the land is “buildable”.

ALL SALES ARE FINAL. NO REFUNDS OR EXCHANGES ARE PERMITTED.

Contact the Sherburne County Property Tax office located at 13880 Business Center Dr. NW, Elk River, MN 55330 for a complete list of terms and conditions. Information can also be obtained on our website www.co.sherburne.mn.us, on the Public Surplus property listing or by calling 763-765-4361.

January 10, 2026

/s/ Loraine Rupp

Sherburne County, Auditor- Treasurer

(Published in the *Patriot*: 01/17/26, 01/24/26, 01/31/26, 02/07/26.)

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS BECKER TOWNSHIP - SHIP-B IG OAK ESTATES & DEER FOREST SHERBURNE COUNTY, MN

Becker Township will be receiving electronic bids for the **Big Oak Estates & Deer Forest Mill & Overlay** project until **7 PM local time on February 17th, 2026**, on **QuestCDN.com**. The regular **Town Board meeting at 12165 Hancock St, Becker, MN 55308**, will be called to order at **7:00 pm** and approximately **7:01 PM**, bids results will be shown and read aloud.

Plans and Specifications may be examined at the office of Bogart, Pederson & Associates, Inc., 13076 First Street, Becker, MN 55308, or obtained by contacting William Tessmer, PE at wtessmer@bogart-pederson.com or 763-262-8822. Plans will also be available for download online at www.QuestCDN.com. **The cost to obtain a hard copy of the Plans & Specifications is \$0 with a \$0 mailing fee.**

The projects includes: milling bituminous pavement, mailbox and sign replacement, gravel shouldering, and re-paving of the milled roads.

Make all bids on the bid form supplied in the specifications – no other proposal submissions will be considered. Bids must be accompanied by a Certified Check or Bidder’s Bond made payable to the Township as a proposal guarantee for **at least 5% of the amount of the bid**. No Bidder may withdraw their bid (which shall include the Certified Check or Bidder’s Bond) within 30 days after the scheduled closing time for the receipt of bids.

The Township will consider award of the contract at the **March 16th** meeting contingent upon Engineer’s review. It is the Township’s intent to begin and complete construction in the year **2026**. The Township reserves the right to reject any or all bids, or parts of such bids, and to waive informalities.

/s/ William H. Tessmer, P.E.

(Published in the *Patriot*: 01/24/26, 01/31/26.)

PATRIOT

OBITUARIES

CORRECTION:

Jerome “Jerry” A. Stenzel, 79 Clear Lake, MN May 4, 1946 – January 6, 2026

Jerry Stenzel, 79, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, January 6th at St Cloud Hospital surrounded by his loved ones as he went home to be with the Lord.

Memorial Services will be 11:00 a.m. Friday, February 6, 2026 at Becker Baptist Church, 11951 Hancock St SE, Becker, Mn. Pastor Stephen Fendley and Pastor Nate Bucher will officiate the service. Visitation will be 1 hour before the services.

Jerry was born in Glencoe, Minnesota. As a young man Jerry excelled in several sports. He was an entrepreneur but sales were his strength which took him across the globe. People would say “he could sell ice to an Eskimo”. He invented several significant agricultural products which continue being used worldwide.

Jerry would want you to know that the most significant and important decision in his life was when he was 45 years of age, he came to know and accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. He and Judy prayed daily for their children and grandchildren. His greatest desire was that they would come to know Jesus intimately through reading God’s Word and to put their faith in Him. He loved his family and often said how very proud he was of ALL his children and grandchildren. He said “they were all better people than he could ever be”. Each one being kind, caring and strong, so unique, talented and he knew how much they loved him.

Jerry loved his extended family and friends. He had many friends but Steve and

Kathy Wesley, Todd and Tonya Knorr topped his list. They shared his love for horses and spent many hours on the phone or at horse shows and auctions together. They talked often about everything, horses, kids, wives, frustrations, joys and God. He was thankful for his good, faithful and trustworthy friends.

He loved going to family reunions so he could connect and tell stories with his uncle Marv and his many cousins.

Jerry was a very charismatic man who touched many lives. He was a man you never forgot after meeting him. And, a man who will never be forgotten by us all.

Jerry is survived by his wife Judy of 42 years, brother Larry, sister Pam Stenzel; children, Jessica (Ryan) Rieland, Jennifer (Kevin) Griffith, Benjamin (Gwen) Stenzel, Jena (Dino) Tack Hickman, Jonathan (Desiree) Stenzel, Joshua (Tom Allen) Stenzel, Joseph (Stephanie) Stenzel, and Jacob Stenzel; grandchildren, Tyler (Maddy) Stenzel, Jordan (Emille Scholl) Stenzel, Logan and Christopher Griffith, Alex and Sydney Tack, Grace Rieland, Addison and Gunther Stenzel, Natalie and Sophia Stenzel.

He is preceded in death by his parents Albin and Mildred (Bartels) Stenzel; brother, Roger, sister Jeanette Stenzel.

Ronald Gaarder, 86 Elk River, MN August 13, 1939 – January 22, 2026

Ronald Gaarder, 86, died peacefully and surrounded by family on Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026 at his home in Elk River. Visitation will be 1:30-4:00 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 14 at the Williams Dingmann Family Funeral Home in Big Lake, with a memorial service from 2:30-3:00 p.m.

Ron was born August 13, 1939, in Starbuck to John and Marguerite (Noyes) Gaarder. The sixth of seven kids, he grew up loving Lake Minne-waska, hunting, skiing, and running around Glenwood doing exactly as he pleased – a pattern that continued into adulthood. He met Joan (Simonson) in the halls of the Annandale school where they were both young teachers. They married in 1968 and moved to their home in Elk River in 1974. Ron became principal at VandenBerge Junior High School, where his love for practical jokes made him a legend among teachers, staff, and students. He was a strong supporter of teachers and he had a knack for working with kids.

Ron was a devoted and active dad who swam and biked with his kids, never missed a soccer game, and made sure his daughters could

change a tire. He loved spending time in the woods, in deer stands, at the lake, with his investment club, and with his many friends and family.

A gregarious social extrovert, he gave stock tips to his doctors and talked to everyone. He delighted in time with his grandkids, who were his pride and joy. He was a good steward of the land, preserving wild spaces and planting hundreds of trees in his lifetime.

Ron was generous, warm, and a good neighbor to all. He was a true character and will be missed dearly.

He is survived by Joan, his wife of 57 years; daughters, Erica (Marcus) Miller of St. Cloud; Emily Gaarder of Duluth; siblings, Dennis Gaarder of Chaska, Corrine Iverson of Minneapolis, and Vernon (Gail) Gaarder of Plymouth; and three grandchildren, Ian Miller, Anna Miller, and Isabel (Izzy) Cregger.

He is preceded in death by his parents; and siblings, Laurel Falconer, Fran Welte, and Gary Gaarder.

The family would like to thank the staff of St. Croix Hospice and Comfort Keepers for their care and support. Ron loved flowers but would also welcome memorial donations to the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation. He was very grateful for the 23 years he gained after his triple-bypass heart operation. To write online remembrances, visit williamsdingmann.com.



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Mayor Kolbinger holds roundtable event for Industrial Park

By Bill Morgan,
Editor

Last week, Becker Mayor Mark Kolbinger organized a roundtable event at Pebble Creek to unite and facilitate better relations with businesses in the industrial park and the city.

The event featured a meet and greet half hour where refreshments were served. A buffet meal of meatballs, fruit, snacks and coffee was part of the proceedings.

At 2 p.m., Kolbinger delivered a welcome speech to the area business owners and outlined his goal to improve connections and partnerships.

Several companies and their employees gave speeches to the IP businesses and thanked them for their business as well as offered their services to the companies for the future. Employees of Sherburne State Bank talked about sponsorship recognition while the Becker Robotics team explained who they are and how important

partnerships with major IP businesses have made their existence and successes materialize.

Bill Morgan of the *Patriot Newspaper* gave an informational speech to the IP companies in how the media can help grow their business through advertising and promotion opportunities. Phil Knutson, Jacob Sanders and others from the City of Becker spoke about improving the relationships formed in the past and providing resolute support moving forward.

Kolbinger handed out a questionnaire that asked those in attendance, “What is the city doing well?”, “What could they improve on?”, What types of assistance is needed?” and “How frequently do the businesses interact with the City of Becker?” The business owners and employees then had discussions at their tables and shared the results following a 15 minute break.

Kolbinger then passed the microphone to the tables for the individuals to share

who they were and what projects they may be working on and what needs are being sought.

This event was one of many erstwhile events with others being planned as the Becker Mayor continues to reach out to the community to hear their concerns.

BECKER MAYOR MARK KOLBINGER held a roundtable last week where he invited business owners of companies who do business in Becker’ Industrial Park. (Patriot Archive Photo).



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DIGGITY

is a 2-year-old neutered bulldog mix who has a lot of energy, and would benefit from obedience training. He can be dog selective, so we recommend a dog-on-dog meet-and-greet at the shelter before bringing him home. He has a little too much interest in cats, so he is looking for a feline-free home. Diggity is a vocal and affectionate pup.



ARLO

enjoys human company, but he's fiercely independent - and he'd prefer to be a solo pet. This almost 3-year-old neutered cat can be a rough player, so cat-savvy humans are a must. Arlo loves ball toys, hunting critters, and he has experience both indoors and outdoors. He is a great match for a home that appreciates a cool, low-key companion.



PARKER

is a 3-month-old Rex mix rabbit who arrived at TCHS with his bunny brothers. Parker is still getting used to handling but is calm and well behaved once in someone's arms. He's met kids and did great with them! He's also doing well with litter box training, though he might need a few reminders to stay consistent. Parker's favorite treat is broccoli.



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Becker gymnasts lose to Monticello

By Maria Moore,
Contributing Writer

Becker gymnastics team competed against Monticello Jan. 20 where they lost 146.45-141.6. This would be their first loss in the Mississippi 8 conference this season.

Currently ranked first in Class AA, Monticello was going to be challenge to beat. That didn't stop the Bulldogs from continuing to improve.

Outstanding all-around performances came from Alyse Denne and Chloe Spear.

Vault started Becker off strong with season best scores coming from Maggie Graning (second place 9.35) and Alyse Denne (third place 9.2). Great scores also came from Chloe Spear and Sabrina Jensen helped the Bulldogs stay close to the Magic.

Bars didn't turn out so great for the Bulldogs with only Denne managing to break into the top five with a fourth place finish and a

score of 8.875.

There was a start of a comeback from the Bulldogs during the **beam** event where Denne took first place honors, scoring 9.225 and Jensen scoring 8.975 which put her in fourth place.

Two personal records were scored on **floor** by Graning taking second with a 9.525 and Denne taking fourth with a 9.4. Eighth grader Alyse Denne had a personal all-around score of 36.7 which put her in second place.

On Jan. 24, Becker competed in the True Team State Championships at Big Lake. Top honors were competed for against the top 10-ranked Class A teams in the state of MN.

Going into the meet, Becker was ranked fourth in the state and they finished in fourth place by the end of the meet.

Denne and Graning were Beckers top finishers on **au** It with each of them tying for 11th with scores of 9.2.

Then Denne placed fifth on **bars** with a 9.0 score and Graning took seventh with a 8.85 score while the team placed third overall in the event.

Denne would go on to tie for 13th place on **beam** with a score of 8.775.

Graning then received top honors for her **floor** routine putting her in fourth place with a score of 9.425.

The **all around** included Denne in fifth place with a score of 36.125 and Graning in sixth place with a score of 36.05. Chloe Spear, Violet Johnson, Lillian Bonsante, and Sabrina Jensen each gave a strong contribution to the team which allowed Becker to end with a fourth place finish.

The final two conference meets are coming up for the girls and then they move on to the championship meet which will decide which team makes it to state.

BLEDA issues bonds totaling \$35,380,000

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

Prior to the Wednesday, January 21, 2026, meeting of the Big Lake City Council, the Big Lake Economic Development Authority approved a motion to issue for sale approximately \$35 million in lease revenue bonds to build the proposed Public Facilities Project, which will house the city hall, the police department, and possibly the library. Land has already been purchased on the north side of the future corner of Co. Rd. 43 NW and Minnesota Ave. Bond payments for BLEDA-owned bonds will be paid for by lease payments from the city.

Before the bonds could be finalized, the council had to vote on a resolution to issue those bonds and to authorize the execution and delivery of a lease agreement with BLEDA. All council members were present, and the motion passed 4-1, with member Ken Halvorson dissenting. Big Lake taxpayers will not be responsible for lease payments until 2027. How those payments affect property taxes at that time will depend on several factors, including tax revenues from new construction and new business, as well as surplus revenue from water and sewage and the general fund.

Open Forum

During Open Forum, Big Lake Resident Dave Nelson expressed dissatisfaction with the Public Facilities Project, claiming that it was approved without meaningful input from Big Lake taxpayers. Nelson explained he believed residents were leaving Big Lake because the city has not invested in infrastructure that directly benefits homeowners, such as a fieldhouse or a community center, facilities that could be built instead of the proposed Public Facilities building.

He praised area businesses for their support of and investments in the local athletic community and then made a plea to taxpayers who no longer have kids in youth sports, "Investing in the future benefits everyone. You don't just pay for what helps you, you pay for what helps your community."

He concluded by asserting that the city's priorities were misplaced and urged them to reconsider the proposal for the new facility.

Preliminary Engineering Report

City Engineer Layne Otteson noted that five open houses were held on January 13, 14, and 15 to inform the public about the upcoming street, sewer, and water projects detailed in the engineering report he presented before

the council. Special attention was given to the expansion of Minnesota Ave. The size of that project is dependent on the city receiving grant money from the state's Local Road Improvement Program. If the grant is received, Minnesota Ave will be extended to Co Rd 43 NW. If not, only the first 500 feet off of 43 will be finished. A final public hearing will be held on February 18, 2016, to finalize the report.

Other News

- The council approved a request for Great River Regional Library to conduct a space needs analysis;

- The council reviewed a concept plan from MC Land Holdings LLC. Owner Todd Christenson was on hand to answer questions about the proposed development;

- Changes to the city's Personnel Policy were approved. The Dangerous Weapon policy was discussed during a previous council workshop, and no changes were made. However, because of those discussions, member Paul Seefeld wanted to express his support for city workers' Second Amendment rights.

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Defendants in Clear Lake fraud case make 1st court appearance

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

Defendants Chad and Kari Koren, and Dustin Luhning made their first Sherburne County court appearance via Zoom on Wednesday, January 14, 2026.

The defendants were given a release without bail, and an Omnibus hearing is scheduled for March 11, 2026. The defendants will be required to appear in person. All three defendants are charged with

felony counts for theft and embezzlement of public funds.

A complaint was filed with the Sherburne County Sheriff Department on April 18, 2024, alleging that city employees had been stealing funds from the city of Clear Lake. A forensic accountant was hired to investigate financial activity during the period from November 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023, by reviewing transactions related to city credit cards, vendors, dis-

bursements, payroll, and bank statement activity.

City Clerk Kari Koren has been accused of receiving payment for hours not worked and fraudulent purchases totaling \$125,217.37. Her husband, Chad, was accused of making personal charges totaling \$,987.17 on city credit cards. Dustin Luhning was accused of misappropriating \$71,077.45 for hours not worked and fraudulent purchases.

Younger BL wrestlers do well at Regionals

By Ken Francis,
Contributing Writer

The younger Big Lake wrestlers had a chance to compete against some of their regional competitors last weekend.

At the MNGWL Region 7 Qualifier last Saturday, the Big Lake ninth grade and younger boys finished ninth of 16 teams.

Rier Fox took the title at 152 pounds. After a bye, the freshman beat Cordell Terrell of Sauk Rapids-Rice, 16-9. He beat Brooks Miller of Paynesville, 18-1, then pinned Owen Willis of Sartell-St. Stephen in the championship match at 2:33.

Jaylen Rand won two matches and finished fifth at 133 pounds. He pinned Mason Gorecki of Mora at

2:28 and he won by medical forfeit over Aiden Medic of Pierz in his final match.

Harlen Bieniek won two matches and finished fifth at 172 pounds. He beat Noah Czeck of Sauk Rapids-Rice by medical forfeit and pinned Caleb Ritter of Belgrade-Broten-Elrosa at 1:24. Iain Cooper won three matches and finished fifth at 189 pounds. He pinned Levi Shamia of St. Cloud Tech at 4:15. He beat Easton Braun of Paynesville, 8-4, and beat Mason Lumley of Becker, 10-8.

Ryker Jackman-Shaw won two matches and finished sixth at 127 pounds. He beat Austin Weber of Sauk Rapids-Rice, 13-1 and he beat Kellan Colford of Becker, 17-0.

The Hornets finished eighth in the Region 7 & 8

Girls Qualifier with two Big Lake girls competing.

Ninth-grader Cora Rand took the title at 124 pounds. After a bye, she pinned Teagan Schmit of Princeton at 0:43, then pinned Trinity Kurzenberger of United North Central at 0:45 in the championship match.

Gracyn Mayer won two matches and placed third at 130 pounds. The seventh-grader pinned Brooklyn Pederson of Moorhead at 4:14 and pinned Kylie Niem of Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton at 0:38.

The Hornet varsity wrestlers had their triangular meet at Albany postponed from last Thursday until Feb. 2. They wrestled in a dual meet at Zimmerman Thursday and at Howard Lake Friday, resulting in a win.

Registration is now open for all ages to audition. Choose to audition February 10-14 in Elk River, Big Lake, and Monticello. Complete information and some helpful audition tips are available at <http://www.northstararts.org> or call 763.245.6627

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Submitted Article

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Bulldog girls claim 3 W's

By Mark Kolbinger,
Contributing Writer

The Becker girls basketball team continues to improve, and that trajectory led to a pair of wins last week.

Vs. Tigers

Tuesday night, Becker completely dominated Princeton, 75-45. The Bulldogs raced to a 40-22 lead in the first half, as eight different players scored in the game.

Becker went to the free throw line 19 times, but made just seven, and Princeton was just four-for-seven from the charity stripe. The Bulldogs made four shots from beyond the arc in the first half, while the Tigers were held scoreless on the long ball.

Adele Changamire led the scoring attack for Becker with 19 total points, while Eilidh Mrnak added 14 points, including four bombs from long range.

Andie Changamire also had 14 points for Becker, and the Bulldogs committed just eight personal fouls in the game.

Juliana Stach grabbed 11 rebounds in the game, Tess Brown reached double figures with 10 boards, and Ady Petty added eight as Becker won the rebound battle 55-47.

Becker remained in second place in the M8 Conference with the win, pushing their record to 6-1.

Vs. Rock Ridge

Last Saturday, Becker defeated a very good Rock Ridge team, who is 12-6 on the season, by a score of 72-65.

"Tess Brown had a great game," Coach Dan Baird said.

Brown scored 16 points on 70% shooting from the field, grabbed eight rebounds and captured four assists and four steals to round out a great stat game.

Andie Changamire added 21 points and 13 rebounds for Becker, while Adele Changamire netted 17 points in the winning effort.

The Bulldogs moved to 9-5 on the season and had a huge week on the schedule this past week, hosting St. Francis, Chisago Lakes, Monticello and Delano in a four game in five night stretch.

Vs. Saints

Tuesday night, the Bulldogs downed St. Francis, 69-44, in a game where 12 different Becker players saw action on the court.

The Bulldogs hit eight three-pointers in the first half en route to a 43-22 lead at intermission.

Becker hit 13 of 16 free throws in the game, increasing their percentage over recent performances. The Bulldogs' defensive pressure was impressive all night, as the players were moving their feet, with Becker being whistled for a paltry seven personal fouls in the game.

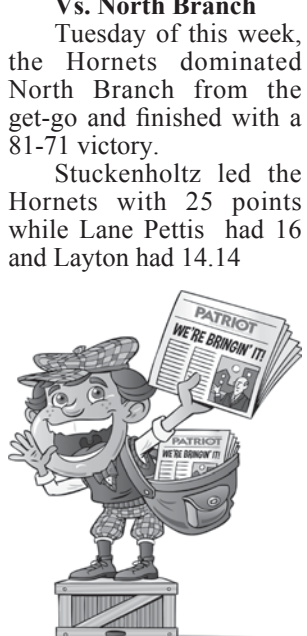
Andie Changamire scored 17 points for the Bulldogs, including five three-pointers, while Eilidh Mrnak had 13 and Alyse had 12.

by, Layton with 24 and Hamrin with 11.

Vs. North Branch

Tuesday of this week, the Hornets dominated North Branch from the get-go and finished with a 81-71 victory.

Stuckenholz led the Hornets with 25 points while Lane Pettis had 16 and Layton had 14.14



Vs. C-I

Last Thursday, the Hornets took on Cambridge-Isanti and came away with a three-point win, 76-73.

Judd Layton scored 23, Trevor Stuckenholz had 15 and Leroy Hamrin had 11.

Vs. Rocori

Big Lake took on a very good Rocori Spartan team last Friday and lost by 12, 83-71.

The Hornets were led

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Freshmen wrestling makes state

By Maria Moore,
Contributing Writer

In the past week, the ninth grade Becker wrestling team made it to the team state tournament and took second place.

They lost to STMA (51-17), but won against Marshall (59-21), Kasson-Mantorville (45-30), and Hastings (38-33).

Next up is the individual ninth grade state individual tournament where the five following individuals qualified: Evan Muellner (107), Rylan Kujawa (133), Mathias Febres Jimenez (139), Ben Anderson (145) and Wyatt Johnson (160).

Varsity results include wins over Monticello (52-14), Forest Lake (41-19), Anandale-Maple Lake (45-18), and Princeton (58-12). They did lose to Brainerd (36-28).

For the Varsity Howard Lake/Waverly/Winsted invite, Bennett Kujawa (139lbs) took first place in his weight class. Co-champion went to both Levi Thompson (145lbs) and Tyler Hall (145lbs) for their weight class. Second place went to Boston Kuschel (133lbs), Chase Stupar (152lbs), and Aiden Golley (189lbs) in each of their weight classes. Fourth place went to both Keaton Colford (121lbs) and Andy Fischer (139lbs) for their weight classes. Fifth place went to Grady Muellner (152lbs), Blaine Cox (172lbs), and Gus Baldry (215lbs) for each of their weight classes. Finally, sixth place went to Owen Ochs (133lbs).

The team took fourth with an overall score of 118pts.

At the Waconia Invite, Harper Hamacher (107lbs), Bennett Kujawa (139lbs), and Aiden Golley (189lbs) took first in their weight classes. Jacob Williams (127lbs), Levi Thompson (145lbs), and Gus Baldry (215lbs) took second in their weight classes. Fourth place went to Tyler Hall (145lbs) for his weight class and sixth place went to Keaton Colford (121lbs).

The team took third place with an overall score of 139pts.

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Bulldog boys tame Tigers - Weiss scores 1,000th point!

By Mark Kolbinger,
Contributing Writer

The Becker Bulldogs boys basketball team picked up another M8 road victory last Tuesday with a 78-57 victory over the Princeton Tigers.

The Bulldogs quieted the Tigers' home crowd by jumping to a 23-7 lead before Princeton trimmed the lead to nine at halftime.

In the second half, the Bulldogs put the defensive clamps on the Tiger offense to hold Princeton to just 57 points in the game, a full 21 points less than their season average

"A lot of credit goes to our boys for competing at a high level on the road," Head Coach Cory Nuest said. "We had some uncharacteristic turnovers and allowed too many offensive rebounds, but our guys stayed together and held their composure through Princeton runs."

Isiah Boyer led the Bulldogs with 24 points, while also grabbing seven rebounds, dishing out four assists, and recording two steals. Nathan Weiss added 25 points, knocking down six three-pointers, while adding seven rebounds, and four assists.

Troy Nuest finished with eight points, six rebounds, eight assists, and four steals, providing steady play on both ends of the floor. Bryce Paumen contributed 15 points, six rebounds, and five deflections. Saul Krefit added six points and eight rebounds, and Nolan Burau chipped in with three rebounds and two assists.



BECKER'S NATHAN WEISS celebrated his 1,000 career point milestone with his teammates and coaches last week. He is the first bulldog to reach the career 1,000 point mark in a decade. (Submitted Photo.)

Vs. Huskies

Last Friday, Becker fell to a very good Albany team, 55-67. Becker entered the game ranked #9 in Class AAA, while Albany was ranked #6 in Class AA.

Nuest knew the matchup would be a tough one, and his pre-game prediction turned out correct.

"I thought going into the game we would need to hold them to 55 points or under to win this game on the road," Nuest said. "They are a hard team to score against, and I felt if we played our system on defense every possession and trusted one another, we had a chance to do that."

After the game was tied at 15 in the first half, Becker went completely ice-cold and didn't score again before intermission as Albany went on a 20-0 run to go ahead 35-15.

Senior Nathan Weiss led all scorers with 27

points and reached a major milestone in the process, becoming Becker's first 1,000 point scorer since 2016.

"It is a huge accomplishment to score 1,000 points," Nuest said. "That's a credit to his relentless hard work and also to his teammates who continue to play the right way."

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