



PATRIOT

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PATRIOT OFFICE763-275-0275
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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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 11 am 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

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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.



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IT'S NOT TOO EARLY
LATE TO BE THINKING ABOUT
NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS



By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

This reporter decided to brave the wind and cold to discover what resolutions people planned to make for the new year.

I chose to spend the noon hour at Dueling Brews in Becker. It was Sat., Dec. 20, and the most common response to my question about their New Year's resolution was, "I haven't thought about it yet."

DuelingBrews Staff

While ordering a Gingerbread Chai, I asked the busy staff about their upcoming resolutions, which ignited a conversation amongst themselves. Manager Jimmy Pudlick shared that he tries not to make them because "he's sad when he breaks them." He turned and chided Ray Clark, who was working the drive-thru, to tell him to resolve to score a goal this year. Then, everyone laughed and said his goal should be to be nicer to all his employees.

Courtney Gass wanted to be more present, Jada



THE STAFF AT DUELING BREWS (BOTTOM PHOTO) Jada Soltau, Payton Treptau, Jimmy Pudlick, Courtney Gass, and Ray Clark. Top left photo, John and Tricia Handorf and top right photo, John and Linda Dickes. (Patriot Photos by Don Bellach).

Soltau vowed to resolve to be more patient. They both suggested to Payton Treptau that she should increase her vertical in the upcoming year. Payton plays volleyball and agreed. Ray decided to work more next year.

Introspective Perspectives

John and Tricia Handorf of Big Lake were seated at the bar and said it was too early to think about resolutions, but with a little prodding offered this. "Do less drinking, lose some weight," said John.

Tricia said, "Work less, travel more."

John agreed, saying,

"I'm not going to argue with the wife. If she's doing it, I'm doing it too."

As we spoke further, they became more reflective, sharing that the older they got, the less material things mattered to them.

They both decided to resolve to spend more time with family and their grand-

Becker Legion hosts annual Christmas Dinner



CHRISTMAS DINNER HELPERS WERE: (Left to right), Helen Swanson, Kelly Kolbinger, Benton-Sherburne American Legion Commander Bill Hannay, Mark Swanson, Mark Kolbinger, and Tim Swanson. (Submitted Photo).

By Mary Nehring,
Contributing Writer

The Becker American Legion Post 193 again played host to the annual Community Christmas Eve Dinner, serving up a traditional meal of turkey and all the fixings.

Bill's Family Foods from Becker played an integral part in helping provide the food, while Becker Legion First Vice-Com-

mander Mark Swanson, and his wife Helen, once again provided their food preparation and serving talents.

Mark's brother Tim, visiting from Boston, lent his expert turkey carving skills to the effort, while Mayor Mark Kolbinger and his wife, Kelly, helped serve the meal to the approximately 60 community members who came for food and fellowship.

Bill's Family Foods from Becker played an integral part in helping provide the food, while Becker Legion First Vice-Com-

Commuter bus service to begin in January

By Ken Francis,
Contributing Writer

The Sherburne County Board last week approved a two-year pilot commuter bus service agreement to replace the NorthStar Commuter Rail service.

The board approved the concept in early October. The bus service is expected to use the current Metro Transit fare of \$3.25, and use the Metro Transit passes for easy transition from Northstar. It will be less than the current NorthStar fares of \$6.25 from Big Lake and \$4.75 from Elk River.

Under the program, the Metropolitan Council will operate commuter express bus service between Big Lake, Elk River and downtown Minneapolis. The state will reimburse the Met Council under a separate joint powers contract.

Sherburne County will subsequently reimburse the state 50 percent of the operating costs invoiced under the joint powers contract

for the commuter express bus service.

The pilot project with both MnDOT and Met Council will begin January 5, 2026 and extend until Dec. 31, 2027. The county's share, approximately \$550,000, will be funded with Local Option Sales



Tax, the same funds that were used for operation and maintenance of NorthStar Commuter Rail.

Wine Bar Permit

After a 45-minute discussion last week, the board decided to delay a decision

regarding a conditional use permit (CUP) for a wine bar in Santiago Twp.

At issue was the status of an existing CUP for a farm-related business - a wine bar.

At a long meeting in November, the Sherburne County Planning Commission voted to recommend revoking the permit, citing a number of violations to the conditions of the permit. Those violations included having cars leaving the property after business hours, having live music on site, posting an additional sign and surpassing the total number of vehicles allowed on site.

The board debated whether to amend the terms of the CUP or revoke the permit.

They eventually agreed to send the issue back to the planning commission to modify a number of conditions based on the board's

COUNTY to page 2

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SUBJECT TO CREDIT APPROVAL

NMLS# 411232

A Small Victory

Ever since my wife, Rita and I started metal detecting back in 2020, we've tried to research places where we could take a short vacation and bring along our detecting equipment.

That's one way to continue detecting when the cold and snow in Minnesota makes it difficult, if not impossible, to detect.

A few years back we took a trip to Arizona in March. We enjoyed the warm weather and managed to come home with a few coins and pieces of jewelry. It was snowing when we got back, so chances were pretty good our trip was the only way we could have detected back then.

This year has been different. We didn't plan a trip to a warm weather place. And the cold and snow started earlier than usual. Temperatures dipped below freezing before Thanksgiving. We've had a few sub-zero evenings, and the ground has been frozen and covered with snow since then, too.

Just before Christmas I was looking through the log book we use to record our detecting information. It lists the date, location and the things we found.

As I paged back to the beginning of 2024, I noticed that I was able to do at least some detecting during every month of that year. That's a pretty good accomplishment, considering Minnesota weather conditions.

This year (2025), I was able to detect in the winter months of January, February and March, even with the cold and frozen ground.

As I continued looking



By Ken Francis
Contributing Writer

through the book, I noticed that the last log entry was November 25, two days before Thanksgiving, but nothing for December.

I didn't want to ruin my streak of detecting (and finding something) in every month of the year, so with just a few days left in the December, I started going through the log book.

Every park would be covered in snow. The only places that would be plowed were parking lots. Then I saw it - Quarry Park in St. Cloud. The parking lot there was dirt and gravel, and lots of people use the ski trails there when it snows. So there was a chance someone might have dropped something in the parking lot.

The temperature the day after Christmas reached 35 degrees, so I drove to the park, took out my detector and hoped for the best. About 20 minutes later I had a signal. I chiseled through about a half-inch of frozen slush and found my target - a penny. I went home a few hours later with 10 pennies, a nickel, a dime and an earring.

My streak remains intact!

As I continued looking

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OBITUARIES

Ronald "Ron" Klindworth, 77
Big Lake, MN
February 16, 1948 - December 24, 2025

Ron was born February 16, 1948 in Wheaton, MN to Lowell "Bud" & Dorothy (Bobblit) Klindworth. He grew up in Wheaton and graduated from Wheaton High School in 1966.

On November 27th, 1966 he wed his high school sweetheart, Karen Ann Fridgen at Ava Maria Catholic church in Wheaton. Ron and Karen had two children, Angela and Raymond. They celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary on Thanksgiving Day, 2025.

Ron attended NDSSS and earned a degree in Architectural Drafting. His first employment experience was with Jolly Green Giant doing night maintenance. He spent a few years between 1972 and 1976 at Fullerton and Meadowvale Lumber before building and opening Big Lake Lumber. He owned and operated this business until his retirement.

Ron enjoyed numerous hobbies over the years including hunting, boating, snowmobiling, drag racing, trap shooting, golfing and bingo. Ron and Karen spent years

traveling with many amazing friends. They went on cruises and toured the country in their motorcoaches. They wintered at Riverbend Motorcoach Resort and later at Verandah in the Fort Myers, Florida area.

Ron passed away on December 24th, 2025. He is survived by his wife Karen; daughter Angela (Tim) Peterson; grandchildren, Amanda Klindworth, Jake (Heather) Horstmann, Josh Horstmann, Walker Peterson, and Mady (Tyler) Brink; 8 great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents; father-in-law, Ray Fridgen; mother-in-law, Gloria Fridgen Kappahn; son Raymond; his sister Sheila and brothers Mark and Kent.

Memorial services will be held on Thursday, January 8th at River of Life Church in Elk River. Visitation will start at 10:00 am and service at 11:00 am with lunch immediately following the service. Burial will be at a later date.



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Heart attack deaths spike during the winter holidays

Submitted Article

The winter holidays can turn deadly as research shows that more people die from heart attacks during the last week of December than at any other time of the year. While being aware of the signs of a heart attack and taking steps to reduce your risk are important all year long, the American Heart Association, devoted to

changing the future to a world of healthier lives for all, says that's especially critical during the next few weeks.

And, in rural communities, where EMS responses can be delayed and minutes matter, it's important to be aware of the signs and symptoms and seek treatment quickly.

A number of scientific studies confirm this deadly phenomenon.

• A study published in *Circulation*, the flagship journal of the American Heart Association, reported that more cardiac deaths occur in the U.S. on December 25 than on any other day of the year, followed by December 26 and January 1;

• In a *British Medical Journal* study reviewing more than 16 years of data on heart attacks among people in Sweden, there was a 15% overall increase in heart attacks during the winter holidays. Of particular note, heart attacks increased 37% on Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve), peaking at 10 p.m. and more often in people over 75 and those with diabetes or previous cardiovascular disease.

"No one wants to think of tragedy during this joyous time of year as we gather with family and friends. However, these startling facts are very sobering. We don't know exactly what triggers this increase in heart attacks during the holidays. It's likely a combination of factors," said Dr. Courtney Jordan Baechler, MD, cardiologist at HealthPartners. "Winter weather has been noted to increase heart attack risk due to restricted blood flow when arteries

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ways to stay active, even if it's going for a family walk or another fun activity you can do with your loved ones;

• **Stick to your meds:**

Busy holidays can cause you to skip medications, forgetting them when away from home or not getting refills in a timely manner. The American Heart Association has a medication chart to help stay on top of it and be sure to keep tabs on your blood pressure numbers.

"We do know there are ways to mitigate your risk for a deadly heart attack.

So, we encourage everyone to pause during the holiday hustle and bustle and make note of these important steps that could be lifesaving," Jordan Baechler said.

The American Heart Association has more on ways to live heart-healthy during the holidays and all year long at heart.org.

Following are several heart-healthy tips for the upcoming holidays:

• **Know symptoms and take action:**

Heart attack signs and stroke symptoms vary in men and women and it's important to recognize them early and call 9-1-1 for help. The sooner medical treatment begins, the better the chances of survival and preventing heart damage;

• **Celebrate in moderation:**

Eating healthfully during the holidays doesn't have to mean depriving yourself, there are still ways to eat smart. Look for small, healthy changes and swaps you can make so you continue to feel your best while eating and drinking in moderation, and don't forget to watch your salt intake;

• **Plan for peace on earth and goodwill toward yourself:**

Make time to take care of yourself during the busy holiday. Reduce stress from family interactions, strained finances, hectic schedules and other stressors prevalent this time of year, including traveling;

• **Keep moving:**

The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week and this number usually drops during the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Get creative with

ways to stay active, even if it's going for a family walk or another fun activity you can do with your loved ones;

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

If your workplace ran like Congress, it would be out of business and you'd be fired/prosecuted. Congress earns \$174,000+ a year, receive 72% taxpayer-subsidized health insurance, qualify for pensions after JUST 5 years (on top of SS), and spend only 170-173 days in session, while most Americans work 250+ days. That's before free "gov" travel (including international), parking, subsidized gyms, and taxpayer-funded office staffs costing millions. From 1997-2018, Congress paid \$17.6 million from a special Treasury settlement fund to resolve Capitol Hill workplace disputes, including sexual harassment. Taxpayers pay. Details stay sealed. In the 2024 cycle, Tom Emmer raised over \$8.1 million, just 6.1% from small

donors, with the rest coming from PACs, AIPAC-aligned groups, and large contributors on top of his taxpayer-funded salary and \$1.3M+ office budget. We see every day that Congress votes in the interest of their financiers, not the people. Our government is riddled with fraud, pedophiles, and rapists. We must unite to clean house! Congress points fingers, We the People pay the price. They still get paid even during shutdowns they're supposed to prevent. STOP pointing fingers! Every side is guilty! Education, scrutiny, diverse media, and voting are needed. We the People deserve better but we must take action and demand it.

Vanessa Davenport
Big Lake, MN

COUNTY
from page 1

discussion. It will come before the board again in January.

Attorney Agreements

The board approved Court Appointed Attorney professional service agreements for a three-year term from Jan. 1, 2026 to Dec. 31, 2028, for the following Attorneys/Firms: Rutland Law PLLC; CC&S PLLP; Poss Law Office, PLLC; Wolford Law & Mediation, LLC; CGW Law Office, LLC; Kabele Law and Mediation, LLC; Trek and Trust Law.

The service agreements provide mandated legal representation and professional services for ongoing and newly filed Sherburne County court cases. The county is mandated by statute to provide court appointed attorney services for Guardianship/Conservatorship; Child in need of Protection or Services (CHIPS)/Termination of Parental Rights (TPR); Family - Paternity/Contempt; Commitments - Mentally Ill (MI), Chemically Dependent (CD), and Mentally Ill/Chemically Dependent (MI/CD); Commitments - Sexually Dangerous Persons (SDP), Sexually Psychopathic Persons (SPP), and Mentally ill and Dangerous Persons (MI&D).

Connexus Support

The board approved a letter of support for Connexus Energy's Empowering Rural America grant application submission to the US Dept. of Agriculture. Connexus plans to add 282 MW of renewable energy in their continued efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) and meet Minnesota's 100% carbon-free mandate. Connexus currently serves approximately 24,333 homes and businesses in Sherburne County.

Engineering Agreement

The board approved a professional services agreement with Houston Engineering, Inc. to provide consulting services to the county for the calendar year 2026. The firm will assist the Solid Waste Dept. with review of various solid waste reports and construction documents

AREA NEWS

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Embark on a path to self-improvement this year

Submitted Article

There is always room to develop, grow and become a better person. With a new year on the horizon, setting self-improvement goals now can help anyone navigate a path to a better version of themselves.

Here are some New Year's resolutions that can help a person grow and nurture their well-being.

Focus on improving time management. Feeling rushed and that you don't have a handle on how you spend your time can exacerbate stress. According to Indeed, making better use of time can enhance productivity, make it easier to meet deadlines and reduce stress. Time management isn't just about work performance. It's also an important tool for getting things done at home. Key aspects of time management involve delegating



tasks, focusing on one thing at a time (as opposed to multi-tasking) and setting priorities;

Become a better listener. You must be able to communicate effectively in all aspects of life to make sure your message is understood. But it's equally important to be able to receive and adapt to the messages

from the inside-out. Keeping a mind-body balance is essential. Reading excerpts from motivational books or passages, turning off notifications on the phone, taking a break from social media, carving out time for spiritual enrichment or meditation, or working on a puzzle can help fuel the mind;

Learn to stop procrastinating. Procrastination can lead to increased stress and unhealthy means to managing stress, according to research published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. Procrastinators are more likely to exhibit avoidant behaviors as deadlines draw closer. To overcome procrastination, breaking down tasks into smaller steps or making short-term goals can help tall tasks feel more achievable.

Man accused of striking mini dirt bike with vehicle at Lupulin

Submitted Article

C. Colbert, 18, of Big Lake, is charged with one count of Felony Assault-2nd Degree-Dangerous Weapon (609.222.1), one count of Misdemeanor Assault-5th Deg-Inflict or Attempt Bodily Harm (609.224.1(2)), and one count of Misdemeanor Traffic - Reckless driving (169.13.1(a)).

The defendant allegedly used his motor vehicle as a dangerous weapon to strike the tire of a mini dirt bike.

According to the complaint, on September 12, 2025, an incident occurred in the parking lot of Lupulin Brewing in Big Lake. Law enforcement reports that Colbert attempted to strike Victim 1 with his ve-

hicle while the individual was riding a mini dirt bike. The defendant reportedly successfully struck the tire of the dirt bike with his motor vehicle.

Victim 1, who was recognized by the defendant, reported that he was grazed on the knee by Colbert's vehicle and expressed his belief that the act was intentional. The complaint notes that the victim's knee was bruised as a result of the contact. Following the collision, the two parties reportedly engaged in a verbal argument. During this dispute, Colbert allegedly punched Victim 1 in the head or face at least twice.

The defendant was charged via summons.

Date Filed in court: 12/29/2025.

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CLASSIFIEDS

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Becker Area Senior Center (BASC)
Open Mon. - Fri. 5am-5pm.
Becker Community Center: 763-200-4271. Planning meeting 3rd Wed. @ 1pm.

Becker American Legion Auxiliary

Auxiliary meetings from November to February are suspended. We will meet again in March of 2025. Contacts are Paula Hinds 763.691.4405 cell and Nellie Simpson 763.482.0619.

Becker American Legion Post 193

Becker Legion meets the second Tues. of every month at 7pm at Becker Legion (old fire hall.)

Becker AA Meeting

Becker Group of Alcoholics Anonymous meets Thurs., 8pm at Mary of the Visitation, 12100 Sherburne Ave, Becker. (320) 247-4732 or email beckeraa@gmail.com

Becker Lions Club

Meetings are held the second Mon. each month at 7pm at Becker City Park's Shelter.

Becker Sons of the American Legion Squadron 193

Meets the third Tues. of each month at 7 pm at Becker Legion (old fire hall). Looking for new members. Andrew Lee (763) 482-9177.

Becker Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Meeting

The monthly meetings are held 6 pm the third Thurs. of the month at Becker City Hall. (320) 980-2752 or see the state website at www.beyondtheyeellowribbon.org.

Big Lake Senior Center

The Big Lake Senior Club meets Tues., 1-4pm, Big Lake City Hall, 160 Lake St. North.

For more information, call: 763-309-1010 or 612-219-1614.

Big Lake American Legion Post #147

Meets the first Thurs. of the month @ 7 pm. Tribune Building, 29 Lake St.

Big Lake OPEN AA Meetings

Mon., 7pm at Saron Lutheran Church, Big Lake. Big Book Study, Handicap Accessible. Questions? Contact: Rob, (763) 218-5328.

The Big Lake American Legion Auxiliary

Meets the first Tues. Mar-Dec. at 6:30pm. Tribune Building, 29 Lake St. Kathy at (763) 263-6093 for information.

Big Lake Beyond the Yellow Ribbon

The Big Lake Beyond the Yellow Ribbon meets at 6:30 pm on the third Mon., of each month in the Community Room adjacent to the Big Lake Police Dept. & the Big Lake Library.

Big Lake Community Food Shelf

The Big Lake Community Food Shelf hours of service are Mon. & Thurs. 5:30-7:30pm & Wed. 9-11am. www.blcfs.org.

The Big Lake Lions

Looking for community minded people to join our organization. If interested send a note to P.O. Box 128, Big Lake, MN 55309 or (763) 263-2218.

Big Lake Women of Today

Hold a monthly general meeting at Senior Activity Center located in the Big Lake City Office Building on the 3rd Thurs. of the month @ 7pm. www.biglakewomenoftoday.webs.com.

Clear Lake Legion

Meets the second Tues. of the month at 4180 105th Ave., Clear Lake. The Legion will meet at 7:30 p.m.

New members are always welcome. Bud Stummel at (320) 761-5793.

Clear Lake Lions

Meets the first & third Tues. of the month at Palmer Twp. Hall at 7 p.m. New members are always welcome. www.clearlakelionsmn.org.

Clearwater American Legion Post 323 & Auxiliary

Meets the second Thurs. of the month. Auxiliary 6:30 p.m., S.A.L. at 7 p.m., Legion at 7:30 p.m. at Clearwater Legion, Clearwater.

Clearwater/Clear Lake Food Shelf

Open Mon. 5:30-7 p.m., Tues., 9-11 a.m. & 6-8 p.m., Wed., 3-5 p.m. in the brown Lions Community Building beneath the water tower in Clearwater. Servicing residents of Clearwater and Clear Lake.

Clearwater Lions Club

Meets second Tues. of the month at 8 p.m. Clearwater Pavilion. www.clearwaterlionsmn.com

Snake River Free Church

Hymn Sing, Sun., Feb. 8, 4:30 p.m. 5 mi. of Hwy. 10 on Co. Rd. 11, 1.5 mi. E on Co. Rd. 5, 3/4 mi. N on 180th St. (8940 180th Ave. SE). For more info, email maryerickson41@yahoo.com

Rejoice Lutheran

Rejoice Lutheran Young at Heart, Clearwater for ages 55+ held the 3rd Thursday each month at 10:30 am. 320-558-6851.

Knights of Columbus

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How to ring in the new year with Mother Nature



NEW YEAR'S DAY needn't be all about headaches and sleeping in. Spending time outdoors is a fresh way to enjoy the start of a new year. (Submitted Photo)

Submitted Article

The arrival of a new year is a time of celebration for people across the globe.

It's customary to mark the occasion with fireworks, countdowns and champagne. For those who indulge a little too much on New Year's Eve or stay up well past midnight, January 1 may be a day to recuperate. But spending New Year's Day with Mother Nature is a great way to enjoy the first few hours of a new year.

• Go hiking. Time spent in freshly fallen snow and crisp air can offer a great way to recharge and approach the new year in a novel way. First Day Hikes were created by America's State Parks to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors. They are held across the United States, but people in Canada or elsewhere can organize these January 1 hikes as well;

• Head to the slopes or a skating rink. Winter and skiing or ice skating are a perfect match. Spend the first day of the year testing out fresh powder, practicing double axels or sipping hot cocoa in the ski lodge;

• Visit a theme park. Some theme parks are still open after hosting holiday-centric special events. Crowds may be small on New Year's Day, ensuring ride enthusiasts they can ride their favorite coasters multiple times.

dusk need not have fallen to enjoy an outdoor fire. Dress warmly and gather friends around a firepit or outdoor fireplace. Swap s'mores for cheese cubes on sticks that can be made warm and slightly melted over the open flames;

• Float or paddle. Take in nature from the water. Although these types of events may be better in warmer climates, those who are courageous enough to brave the elements can spend some time kayaking or floating on waterways that have not frozen over;

• Head to the slopes or a skating rink. Winter and skiing or ice skating are a perfect match. Spend the first day of the year testing out fresh powder, practicing double axels or sipping hot cocoa in the ski lodge;

• Visit a theme park. Some theme parks are still open after hosting holiday-centric special events. Crowds may be small on New Year's Day, ensuring ride enthusiasts they can ride their favorite coasters multiple times.

Orrock does not want to be in the parks business

**By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer**

The Orrock Township Board continued to define what a new agreement with the Lake Association at Ann Lake might look like going forward.

Board Chair Anne Felber conceded during the December 17, 2025, meeting, that there were issues that needed to be decided saying, "Now that we've decided to terminate the agreement, we are now in the parks business."

Felber and Board Member Paul Ellinger recently met with members of the Lake Association to begin talks on the new agreement. The general agreement would be to have the township take care of the maintenance of the area surrounding the boat landing and the association would focus on the water quality of the lake, though nothing formal has been voted on by the township board.

Maintenance for the landing has been estimated to be between \$3,300-\$3,500 per year, however, after speaking with attorney Bob Ruppe, a 1999 Trails and Waterways agreement with the DNR could push those costs to \$5,000 per year. The DNR installed concrete and planking to

the boat landing years ago. Ellinger shared his concerns about upcoming repairs, "We need to look at the big picture. The planking is going to need to be replaced and that's going to be expensive." He continued to offer this warning, "We're getting into an area we don't want to get into."

Felber tried to keep the discussion focused on three immediate options — Keeping the park open, maintaining it year-round without snow removal in the winter, and continuing the current maintenance schedule, which includes grading the parking lot. Those three options were put into motions and passed

unanimously. Further details regarding amenities would be negotiated between the township and the lake association.

Sheriff's Report

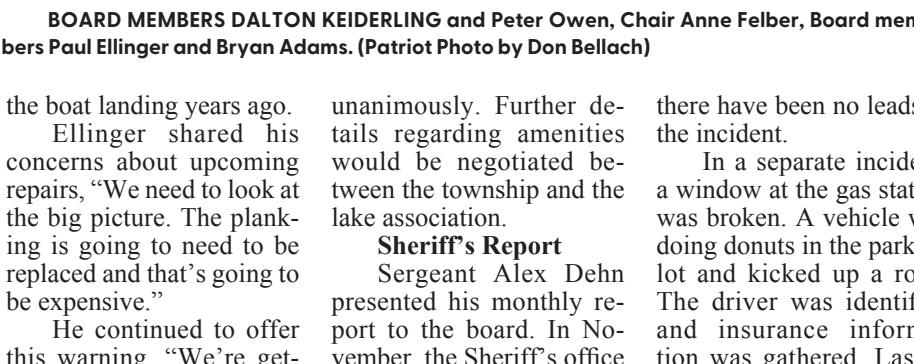
Sergeant Alex Dehn presented his monthly report to the board. In November, the Sheriff's office handled a total of 138 calls for service. Notable incidents included three stop arm violations. All drivers were identified and addressed. Five thefts, three of which were gas drive-offs at the Sand Dunes fuel station, were resolved through reimbursement. The person responsible for the theft of a hitch and mud flaps off a truck at a resident's home still has not been found, and

there have been no leads in the incident.

In a separate incident, a window at the gas station was broken. A vehicle was doing donuts in the parking lot and kicked up a rock. The driver was identified and insurance information was gathered. Lastly, an abandoned motorcycle frame was found at 253rd Ave on 108th St. The motorcycle was likely stolen and dumped.

Other Business

The board approved a renewal of a cleaning contract through Options, Inc. for 2026. Cleaning services will be completed every other week at \$51.50 per hour. Security updates were



BOARD MEMBERS DALTON KEIDERLING and Peter Owen, Chair Anne Felber, Board members Paul Ellinger and Bryan Adams. (Patriot Photo by Don Bellach)

approved for the Town Hall. Chris Johnson of Johnson Digital Solutions LLC, based in Zimmerman, quoted a price of \$1,177. A resolution was passed authorizing the updates for \$1,177 not to exceed \$400.



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County adds youth protections to Tobacco Ordinance

Submitted Article

Sherburne County has adopted an updated Tobacco Ordinance that will take effect on July 1, 2026.

These updates to local tobacco regulations ensure alignment with Minnesota state law while incorporating important community health protections. By reducing youth access and exposure to commercial tobacco and nicotine products, these provisions promote a healthier environment for Sherburne County residents and aim to improve long-term health outcomes.

This ordinance applies to all tobacco retailers licensed through the county, including those in the townships and in the cities of Baldwin and Zimmerman.

Key provisions include:

- Establishing 18 as the minimum age for individuals selling tobacco;
- Restricting sales of flavored vaping products to licensed tobacco shops only;
- Restricting all tobacco and vape product sampling;

A summary of the changes is available at <https://www.co.sherburne.mn.us/489/Tobacco-Free-Living>. Both the current and newly adopted ordinances are available on the County website at <https://www.co.sherburne.mn.us/651/County-Ordinances>.

Patel said that previous fraud arrests in Minnesota were "just the tip of a very large iceberg."

FEDERAL FRAUD INVESTIGATION UNDERWAY IN MINNEAPOLIS

Submitted Article

(The following article is from a post by the Associated Press on Monday, Dec. 29).

Federal Homeland Security officials were conducting a fraud investigation on Monday in Minneapolis, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said.

The action comes after years of investigation that began with the \$300 million scheme at the nonprofit Feeding Our Future, for which 57 defendants in Minnesota have been convicted. Prosecutors said the organization was at the center of the country's largest COVID-19-related fraud scam, when defendants exploited a state-run, federally funded program intended to provide food for children.

A federal prosecutor alleged earlier in December that half or more of the roughly \$18 billion in federal funds that supported 14 programs in Minnesota since 2018 may have been stolen. Most of the defendants are Somali Americans, they said.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said then that fraud will not be tolerated and that his administration "will continue to work with federal partners to ensure fraud is stopped and fraudsters are caught."

Noem on Monday posted a video on the social platform X showing DHS officers going into an unidentified business and questioning the person working behind the counter. Noem said that officers were "conducting a massive investigation on childcare and other rampant fraud."

"The American people deserve answers on how their taxpayer money is being used and ARRESTS when abuse is found," U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement posted.

The action comes a day after FBI Director Kash Patel said on X that the agency had "surged personnel and investigative resources to Minnesota to dismantle large-scale fraud schemes exploiting federal programs."

Patel said that previous fraud arrests in Minnesota were "just the tip of a very large iceberg."

President Donald Trump has criticized Walz's administration over the fraud cases to date.

In recent weeks, tensions have been high between state and federal enforcement in the area as the Trump administration's immigration crackdown focused on the Somali community in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, which is the largest in the country.

Among those running schemes to get funds for child nutrition, housing services and autism programs, 82 of the 92 defendants are Somali Americans, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for Minnesota.

Walz spokesperson Claire Lancaster said that the governor has worked for years to "crack down on fraud" and was seeking more authority from the Legislature to take aggressive action. Walz has supported criminal prosecutions and taken a number of other steps, including strengthening oversight and hiring an outside firm to audit payments to high-risk programs, Lancaster said.

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2026 Big Lake School District Tax Levy to increase 4.6%

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

With all members present, the Big Lake School Board certified the 2026 Property Tax Levy on Wed., Dec. 17, 2025.

The total levy amount was \$13,887,802.55, an increase of 4.6% over last year, or \$605,295. It was noted that despite the district continuing to deficit spend in the General Fund unassigned fund balance, the district did not levy the full amount that the MN Department of Education (MDE) authorized for 2026.

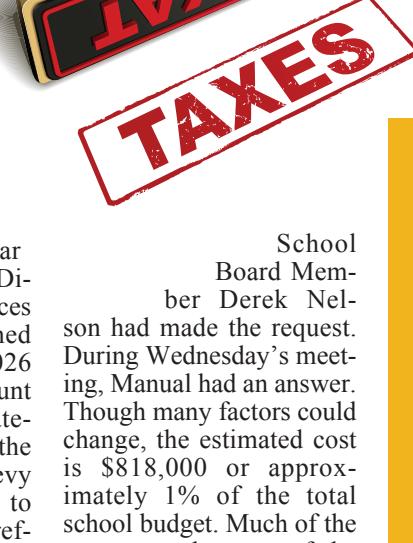
Truth in Taxation

Prior to the regular school board meeting, Director of Business Services Angie Manuel explained that the maximum 2026 property tax levy amount for school districts statewide is determined by the MDE. Big Lake can levy less but it is required to pass a voter-approved referendum for more.

Big Lake levied \$348,486.96 less than the maximum. The decision was made to maintain consistency with previous years' levies. In fact, if homeowners see an increase in their property tax amount for ISD 727, it is because of an increase in home values.

Fiscal Challenges

Since 2002-03, the State-mandated General Education Formula Fund has not kept up with the rate of inflation. Although a 2.75% increase was approved for 2025-26, a 19% increase was needed to keep pace with inflation. Additionally, special education remains underfunded. Statewide, funding for special education in 2024 fell short of costs by \$503 million. By 2028, those costs will be underfunded by \$524 million.



into effect in 2026.

Donations

The Big Lake business community continues to be generous, with several donations exceeding \$1,000. Riverside Church donated \$6,000 in Walmart gift cards to help families in need. Big Lake Spud Fest made two donations of \$5,000 each to the Integrated Mental Performance Partnership and for Prom.

The Central Minnesota Manufacturers Association donated \$1,120 for a Youth Apprentice event.

Mathison Motors donated winter clothing totaling \$620.

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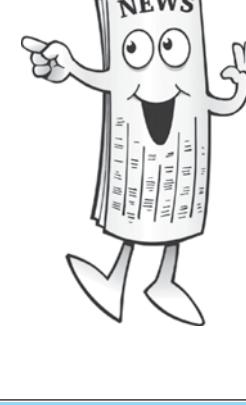
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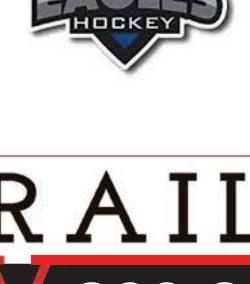
Becker/Big Lake Eagles take tough loss

By Maria Moore, Contributing Writer

The Becker/Big Lake Eagles hockey team took on the Chisago Lakes Wildcats on Thurs., Dec. 18. Unfortunately, they were unable to overpower them, and in the end, they lost 7-4.

The four players who scored on the Eagles' side were Raymond Clark, Carter Tatge, Tate Spilde, and

Lucas Hancock. Assists came from Jack Schwartz (two), Spilde (two), and Tanner Felton (one).



Hornets advance to title game at Perham, win big

By Bill Morgan, Editor

Big Lake's boys basketball team recently defeated Paynesville 90-74 on Dec. 29, 2025, at the Holiday Hoops tournament in Perham.

Big Lake advanced to the championship against Perham (played Tuesday) and Paynesville played Sauk Centre for third place.

Judd Layton led the Hornets with 28 points while Trevor Stuckenholtz had 14 and Eddie Reiner-

also had 14.

The win improved Big Lake's record to 3-2, while Paynesville dropped to 2-5.

Games were held at Perham High School (The Hive), Prairie Wind Middle School, and Heart of

the Lakes Elementary.

Vs. Perham

The Hornets captured the title with a 82-70 win over Perham Tuesday night. Judd had 18 points, Will Newland, 18, Leroy Hamrin 14, and Lane Pettis, 11.

Bulldog girls 1-1 at Breakdown GCC

By Mark Kolbinger, Contributing Writer

The Becker girls basketball team split a pair of games at last weekend's Breakdown Granite City Classic, losing to Byron 70-48 on opening night before picking up a 68-52 win over Sartell the next day.

In the win over the Sabres, the Bulldogs enjoyed a 10 rebound advantage on the boards and led 36-27 at halftime to avenge last season's loss.

"We lost to Sartell last year down the stretch so it was nice to get them this time around," Coach Dan Baird said. "Our turnovers were down (from the previous day) so we had a nice, pretty clean game."

Juliana Stach had her best game as a Bulldog,

scoring 20 points, and adding 10 rebounds, six assists, and five steals for a double double performance.

"She was six-for-eight from the three-point line and played incredible defense," Baird added.

Andie Changamire had 14 points and nine rebounds to continue her fine season, while Baird credited Adele Changamire for her excellent defensive game, holding Sabre standout Kennedy Lewis to just 13 points.

Additional Becker stats: Adele Changamire 11 points, six rebounds; Ady Petty five assists; Alyse Denne five points; Rowan Hausmann five points; Tess Brown 13 points, five rebounds.

Byron
In the opening round

loss to #9 state-ranked Byron, the Bulldogs committed too many turnovers (26) to keep the game close.

"We committed 26 turnovers which led to 33 points off turnovers for Byron, whereas we only accumulated 10 points off turnovers," Baird said.

"That was really the difference in the game. We did a poor job at breaking their press all night."

Adele Changamire led Becker with 13 points, while Andie Changamire had 10 points and seven rebounds.

The Bulldogs will be back in action this week, hosting Zimmerman on Tuesday and North Branch on Friday.

Bulldog boys 1-1 in CC Classic

By Mark Kolbinger, Contributing Writer

The Becker Bulldog boys basketball team went 1-1 in the Breakdown Capital City Classic last weekend.

Last Saturday, Becker dominated with a 73-35 win over St. Paul Harding in a game that saw Senior Nathan Weiss set the program's all-time record for made three-pointers with his 161st career make from beyond the arc.

Head Coach Cory Nuest emphasized that the milestone reflected much more than individual success.

"As a coach, it's always hard to know how much to highlight individual accolades because every record is built on the teamwork behind it," Nuest said. "Nathan does so many other great things for us. He leads our team in assists, has been guarding one of the other team's top scorers, and has been rebounding at a high level. That makes it easy to celebrate his accomplishments."

Overall, the Bulldogs were unselfish on the offensive end, recording 23 assists while committing just nine turnovers. Nuest's squad battled on the boards, with 17 offensive rebounds despite being undersized.

Bryce Paumen led the scoring with 27 points (nine rebounds), while Isiah Boyer finished with 12 points (seven rebounds). Other notable stats included Troy Nuest with eight rebounds and six assists, and Saul Kreft with seven points and seven rebounds.

Nuest also credited the entire roster for the culture the Bulldogs are building.

"All of our guys are



BULLDOG NATHAN WEISS pictured here in the team's victory over Delano last week, recently claimed the career three point record for the Becker boys program. (Submitted Photo.)

unselfish, and that's what makes this group really fun to coach," he said.

South

A night earlier, Becker suffered its first loss of the season, 80-82 in double overtime, on a buzzer-beater against Minneapolis South.

Becker entered the matchup ranked #7 in the state and was tested throughout by a South team with talented guards who shot the ball well and consistently put pressure on the Bulldogs' defense.

"South took us out of our formula for winning basketball games," Nuest said. "They broke down our defense, hit open shots, and when they missed, they extended possessions on the glass."

Despite the loss, Becker showed toughness

and competitiveness, battling through regulation and two overtime periods.

Boyer led the Bulldogs with 30 points, nine rebounds, and four assists, while Bryce Paumen added 24 points and a team-high 12 rebounds. Weiss contributed 11 points, six rebounds, and nine assists, and Troy Nuest chipped in 11 points, four rebounds, four assists, and three steals.

"Our guys played hard and competed the entire game," Nuest said. "This was a great opportunity for us to be in a game like this early in the season. It showed some areas we need to clean up, and that's how you learn and get better."

