

PATRIOT OFFICE
763-275-0275
14054 Bank Street,
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The Patriot is the official newspaper for Clear Lake, Clearwater, Orrick, 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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Colonel Ray cements legacy with new book

By Mark Kolbinger,
Contributing Writer

Colonel Ray Henry has enjoyed an amazing career as an entrepreneur and auctioneer, with a myriad list of international successes that range in scope from the heavy equipment industry to his most recent foray into software development.

As his sons have now transitioned into a more prominent role within the family-owned I.R.A.Y. Companies, it freed up Colonel Ray's time to focus on cementing his legacy through the writing of an incredible memoir, *The Echo of the Gavel*.

"I've been thinking about writing this book for more than a few years," says Henry. "I wanted to tell the story . . . because if I didn't tell it, no one would have known about the trials, tribulations and successes. The message is powerful, yet simple. We can never give up."

The uniquely moving book is both a historical testament to the lessons he learned from his father (Don) and grandfather (MJ), as well as a mandate to the next generation of Henrys who are now making a name for themselves in the family business. Ray's desire to pass along decades worth of knowledge and stories of trial and error was instrumental in putting his author skills into action.

The final push came when Ray was talking to a good friend and accomplished author who worked in the manufacturing industry, and he gave the perfect advice to spur the endeavor. "He said, 'don't keep wishing it, do it,'" says Henry.

Blessing

One of the core tenants of Colonel Ray's success has been his eagerness to give back to others within his orbit, from his commu-



COLONEL RAY HENRY OF I.R.A.Y. COMPANIES recently published his first book, *The Echo of the Gavel*. He will be hosting a book signing this Sunday at Jack and Jim's. (Submitted Photo).

nity to his colleagues and fellow business owners.

From charitable auctions across the upper Midwest, to his willingness to serve as mentor and business consultant, the art of giving back was set in stone by his grandfather Maurice, known as M.J. He passed when he was just 64 years old, but Ray remembers vividly the impact he had on those around him.

"The wake stretched over a number of days because so many people came from across the country to wish the family well and

pay homage to the man who had done so much for them," recalls Ray. "He had been extremely successful in the auction business and he had sent bid callers to help others auctioneers . . . he had a big impact on so many people and other businesses."

Those same core beliefs are something that have been a cornerstone of Ray's business model: being unyieldingly ethical and always taking the time to count his many blessings and in turn sharing the success with others.

Clear Lake discusses hiring policy for new fire chief



COUNCIL MEMBER LANCE GILLILAND, Mayor Tim Goenner, Council members Stefany Janish and Sabrina Miller. (Patriot Photo by Don Bellach)

By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

Every member of the Clear Lake City Council was present at the Jan. 5, 2025, meeting.

On the agenda was time for the personnel committee to update the council about developing a process to elect a new Fire Chief. During the December meeting, Matt Lunser was named Interim Chief, "until they (the Personnel Committee) can create a policy on electing a new chief."

Though no new policy was formalized, a few de-

tails were revealed. Lance Gilliland had explained that the current policy states that the fire chief can only be removed for cause. He suggested limiting the fire chief to a four-year term, a detail confirmed by Stefany Janish and Gilliland after the meeting. Also, firefighters wanted input into the process. Gilliland, Janish, and Lunser all stated during the meeting that upcoming Fire Board meetings would give firefighters the opportunity to nominate their choice. The council is hoping to name a replacement by March of this year.

CityP roperty

Near St. Marcus

At the Nov. 17, 2025, meeting of the city council, Chris Goenner from St. Marcus Church advocated for using a nearby city-owned property as a holding pond to help prevent flooding in the church parking lot. Nothing was decided at the meeting; however, a consensus emerged that the city should consider testing the property for well development.

On Monday, three members of the Arnold

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BENTON COUNTY 4-H AMBASSADORS HOLD CANDY CANE EVENT



THE BENTON COUNTY 4-H AMBASSADOR CANDY CANE NIGHT gave youth a chance to connect, meet new friends, and feel part of something special in 4-H. Pictured: Front Row L to R: River Ferkinhoff, Makayla Traut, Malorie Rahm, Marnie Rahm, Allie Barringer, Ana McKay and Eli Rademacher. Middle Row L to R: Kendall Micholski, Kaylin Maloney, Merrie Schneider, Ava Kolbinger, Mia Messerli, and Luke McKay. Back Row L to R: Olive Thiessen, Kenzie Manea, Hailey Manea, Jasmine Manea, JulieAnn Gerads, Eve McKay, Val McKay, Makenna Hanson, 4-H Youth Coordinator- Ann Olson, and Trevor Tasa. (Submitted Photo).

Submitted Article

The Benton County 4-H Ambassadors held their Candy Cane Event a couple Mondays ago during their holiday break from school, bringing together laughter, friendly competition, and holiday cheer. The night gave ambassadors the opportunity to connect, build

friendships, and enjoy hands-on games—along with plenty of memorable Saran Wrap fun.

Ambassadors rotated through a variety of candy cane-themed challenges throughout the evening, adding a playful spirit of

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Holding Those in Power to Account

This year, we will celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the creation of our nation. Also, this year, on January 19, 2026, we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of Martin Luther King Day. Both observations will be about the same thing: holding those in power accountable for their actions.

Unjust Laws

Colonists gathered in Boston on March 5, 1770, to protest the presence of troops from Great Britain that had been sent to protect British officials and enforce British legislation passed without any input from the colonies. The soldiers were harassed; people threw snowballs and verbally abused them until a shot rang out. A British regular had discharged his weapon. Five people would be killed that day. That was the beginning of the revolution that would be the genesis for our country. A country that declared that all people were created equal and were endowed with certain unalienable rights: the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

During his lifetime, MLK asserted the same rights. He stood against unjust segregation laws that would not allow black people to sit at a lunch counter, use the same bathrooms and drinking fountains, and vote in the same elections as white people.

When he organized the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, he gave this reason for the protest in what would be called his I Have a Dream speech, "In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The Blame Game

In both instances, the powers that be responded with threats and violence. In both instances, some people argued that the protesters were responsible for the ensuing violence. In colonial times, some justified the



By Don Bellach,
Contributing Writer

king's harshness because he was the one who was trying to maintain order, while the rebels were the ones breaking the law. During the civil rights protest, demonstrators were told not to march in order to avoid confrontation with the local police.

King found that assertion absurd, writing in his Letters from a Birmingham Jail, "In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn't this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery?"

True Colors

The non-violent protests that MLK led revealed the true nature of the people in power who opposed them, just as the Revolution revealed the true nature of the British authorities who opposed the formation of the United States. Both the Southern authorities and the British government held power to benefit themselves, not to improve the lives of those they served, and they asserted their power to control them using any means necessary. Those who participated in the Civil Rights Movement and the American Revolution rejected those ideas and insisted that those in power use their power to serve the people. That is the great sentiment expressed by Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address, where he said we should be devoted to the American experiment of having a government, "...of the people, by the people, and for the people."

That devotion is best demonstrated when we hold those in power accountable for the use of that power.

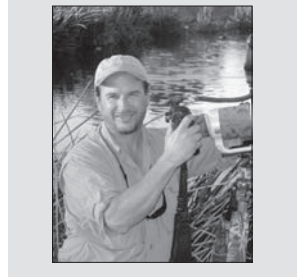
In the Northwoods: Woodpeckers

Winter in the Northwoods is a very special place and time of year. There is just something exceptional and inviting about the absolute silence, stillness and wildness that combines to make it a great place to be alone and experience nature.

The wildlife in the Northwoods is unlike any other habitat. Several interesting and unique species occur here. Sure, many of the more familiar species also occur here but it's the Northwoods specialists that really interest me.

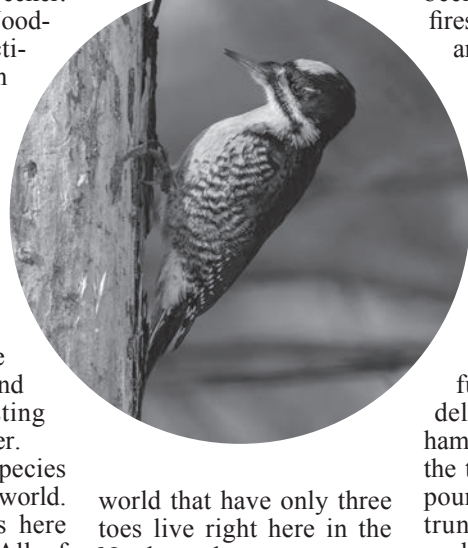
Recently I spent some time looking for a Northwoods specialty bird, the Black-backed Woodpecker. The Black-backed Woodpecker (Picoides arcticus) is also known as the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker. Right now, you might be thinking to yourself, Three-toed Woodpecker is a strange name. Obviously, this bird must have only three toes. Let's take a closer look at this and see what is interesting about this woodpecker.

There are 241 species of woodpecker in the world. We have 23 species here in North America. All of these woodpeckers around the world have four toes, except for three. Yep, you got that. Of all the woodpeckers in the world, only three of them have three toes. They are the Three-toed Woodpecker (Picoides dorsalis) the Black-backed



By Naturist
Stan Tekiela

Woodpecker (Picoides arcticus) and the Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (Picoides tridactylus). So, two out of the three species of woodpecker in the



world that have only three toes live right here in the Northwoods.

One of the many amazing things about woodpeckers is their feet. In order to cling to the vertical sides of trees without falling off is the number of toes they have and how those toes are arranged. Toe arrangement in birds is critical. Most

This week, the U.S. House of Representatives returned to Washington and got back to work. I look forward to continuing to advance the priorities of Minnesota's Sixth Congressional District constituents in 2026.

The Fraud Fiasco Continues

The fraud crisis in Minnesota remains at the front and center of my work in Washington, D.C. This week, I published an op-ed with Fox News on Minnesota's record fraud under Gov. Tim Walz. In it, I outlined the fraud crisis that Governor Walz has blatantly ignored for years. Under his watch, fraud within Minnesota reached \$9 billion, according to individuals in the U.S. Attorney's Office.

On December 29, 2025, I sent a letter to Gov. Walz, demanding immediate action on the fraud. Our Minnesota colleagues and I have been demanding information, documents, and answers for more than three years. The letter comes as investigative journalist, Nick Shirley, uncovered indisputable fraud in Somali-run daycare and healthcare organizations in Minnesota. During his visit, he discovered empty buildings, multiple businesses listed at the same address, misspelled signs, and more. In just one day, he found more than \$110 million worth of fraud.

This proves that this fraud is as plain as the day is long. Minnesotans are rightfully outraged, and we deserve better. I could not be more grateful to Nick Shirley, President Donald Trump, and his all-star cabinet for their work to combat the fraud in Minnesota. We will not rest until justice is served.

House Oversight Committee Hearing

Finally, the situation in Minnesota is getting the national attention it warrants.

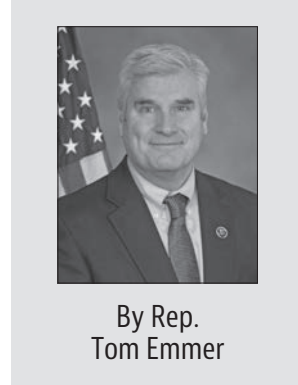
The House Oversight Committee held a hearing this Wednesday on the rampant fraud in Minnesota. My good friends, Minnesota State Representatives Walter Hudson, Marion Rarick, and Kristin Robbins, two of whom are from the Sixth Congressional District, served as

birds have four toes, with three facing forward and one backwards. For most woodpeckers they have a unique toe arrangement. They have two toes forward and two toes back. This is called a zygodactyl foot. The extra toe facing the rear gives them more gripping strength to hold onto the tree and fight gravity.

So, what's up with the species that only have three toes? This specialized adaptation gives the bird an advantage when searching for food. The Black-backed Woodpecker specializes in feeding on the larvae of wood-boring beetles, especially in forests that have been damaged by forest fires. So, these birds move around from year to year following areas of forest that have been damaged by forest fires, which can make finding these woodpeckers challenging.

The advantage of the three toes in this woodpecker allows them to lean further back and thus deliver a more powerful hammering blow to remove the tree's bark. While they pound directly into a tree trunk like other woodpeckers, much of what the Black-backed Woodpecker does is more of a glancing blow. This sideways pecking flecks or peels the outer bark off the tree which exposes the larva stage of the beetles which is the majority of their food source.

The larvae range from



By Rep.
Tom Emmer

witnesses during the hearing. Serving on Minnesota's Fraud Committee, they have worked tirelessly to expose the fraud and hold those responsible accountable.

In the hearing, I called out Minnesota's media, Gov. Walz, and state leaders for ignoring the fraud in Minnesota, including overwhelming evidence, investigations, criminal charges, and more. Their silence has made them complicit. During my questions, all three of the State Representatives confirmed my suspicion: Governor Tim Walz had knowledge of this fraud and did nothing to stop it.

During my questions to Representative Hudson, he confirmed two key facts. One, that 90% of the individuals charged with fraud in Minnesota are of Somali descent, and two, that Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison was caught on tape promising to obstruct his own agencies in their investigations of fraud perpetrated by Somalis. Additionally, Representative Rarick confirmed reports of retaliation against whistleblowers from leaders within the state who have come forward to report this fraud. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Make no mistake, Governor Walz is complicit, and his complete disregard for this longstanding problem has made Minnesota a national disgrace. Accountability must be taken.

I remain committed to fighting on Minnesota's behalf. Minnesotans deserve answers and accountability on this fraud that has been happening right under Governor Walz's nose. As always, if there's anything my office can do to help you, please don't hesitate to reach out.

2 to 15 mm in length. Each one is a protein packed package of food. While photographing the Black-backed Woodpecker over 2 days, I watched as they pulled one larva after another out from under the newly flaked bark. When they find a tree with a good amount of bark beetle larvae they usually stay on the tree for upwards of 15 or 20 minutes, moving up and down flaking off the bark and exposing the larvae underneath.

After two days of searching and photographing the Black-backed Woodpecker in the great Northwoods in winter, I was ready to warm up and get back to the office. Until next time...

Stan Tekiela is an author / naturalist and wildlife photographer who travels the world to capture images of wildlife. He can be followed at www.Instagram.com and www.Facebook.com. He can be contacted via his website at www.NatureArt.com.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

We Minnesotans need to step back and take a good, honest, rational look at what is going on in our State. Minnesota has declared "Sanctuary State" status. What exactly does that mean? Apparently, it means we believe it is good to accept and protect known and convicted criminals from all over the world. Minnesota Nice? Not. Does it make sense to harbor criminals? ICE would prefer to gather criminals while they are in detention. If the police would cooperate with the federal authorities, ICE would not need to hunt and recapture criminals in "quiet" neighborhoods -- like the "quiet" neighborhood where Ms. Good found herself driving around last week. Question: How did so many people so quickly end up in such a peaceful, quiet community on that fateful day? And why? Minnesota Nice is the caring for the safety of all Minnesotans, including our legal immigrants. It is not the harboring of criminals who have no respect for law.

Dr. Ronald and
Marlene Schultz
Big Lake, MN

TO THE EDITOR:

Government officials raiding schools, hospitals, churches, and immigration courts. Fire-fighting efforts halted mid-wildfire. Masked, heavily armed individuals detaining people without clearly identifying themselves or presenting warrants. Shootings/

killings by federal officers that are not investigated by the very government office created to investigate civil-rights violations by law enforcement. This is daily life for citizens and immigrants alike, people now afraid to go downtown, attend church, or seek medical care. Even minority service members are afraid. Door-to-door searches raise an uncomfortable question: why was Anne Frank's family hiding in an attic? In Chicago's Operation Midway Blitz, heavily armed ICE and DHS agents reportedly rappelled from helicopters, deployed tear gas in residential neighborhoods, detained U.S. citizens and children, and disrupted ordinary community life. The Department of Justice Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section exists to investigate unlawful use of force by law enforcement. Yet in the Renee Good shooting, that division was excluded, even as career prosecutors resigned, citing political interference. Meanwhile, H.R. 4371 expands enforcement around unaccompanied children, raising concerns about invasive searches and prolonged detention. I've been to over 30 countries. I never expected to see this here. Removing violent criminals, I am all for but this isn't what is happening. If this isn't what you voted for, it's your civic duty to call your representative.
Vanessa Davenport
Big Lake, MN

Operating More Efficiently

As we begin 2026, the Big Lake City Council is adjusting its meeting schedule to better reflect the needs of our community and the work before us. Moving forward, the City Council will meet once per month instead of twice. Meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of each month, with a Council Workshop starting at 5:00 pm and the regular City Council meeting beginning at 6:30 pm.

This change followed thoughtful discussion between the City Council and city staff. An important factor in this decision was the efficient use of city staff time and taxpayer resources. Preparing for and supporting City Council meetings requires significant work from multiple departments, both during and outside of normal business hours. By reducing the number of meeting nights each month, staff can spend more time focused on day-to-day operations and service delivery, rather than meeting preparation. This approach helps ensure that taxpayer dollars are used as effectively as possible while still maintaining a high level of service and thoughtful decision-making.

Another reason for the adjustment is that the volume of council business has decreased since the city updated its zoning code in 2023, making things more efficient. With fewer items requiring council action, it made sense to consider whether our meeting schedule still matched the work



By Paul Knier
Big Lake Mayor

before us. The goal is to operate more efficiently while continuing to provide open, effective local government. This change does not affect administrative approval authority, and city operations will continue as they always have.

As always, public participation is welcome! Residents are encouraged to attend meetings, share their perspectives, and stay engaged in local issues. Public input remains an important part of the decision-making process. If an issue arises that requires timely action that our new schedule cannot accommodate, Special City Council meetings can still be called as needed.

We also recognize that adjustments can take time. City staff and the City Council have agreed to stay in close communication and raise concerns if the new schedule is not working as intended. Local government should always be willing to listen, learn, and improve.

Thank you for your understanding and continued involvement in our community.

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family appeared before the council to discuss the half-acre lot located next to the city property. They contend that they cannot sell the property because there is no access to it. They were wondering what the city was planning in the area, acknowledging that the city was considering granting St. Marcus an easement for ponding in the area.

During the discussion, it was noted that the city has conflicting priorities concerning the property. City Engineer Keith Yapp suggested getting all the parties together in a room to work things out. Gilliland still wanted to test for water, "If there's no water, the city doesn't need it."

Yapp stated that "spring may be the time to do a core sample."

After much discussion, no resolution was reached.

Other News

The *Patriot* was named the official newspaper for disseminating city information that must be made public under state statutes.

The council approved a motion that would allow city employees to carry over 40 hours of PTO to the next year.

Changes to the employee handbook were tabled until February's meeting.

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OBITUARIES

Arlene Mae Opstad (Inderrieden), 87 Big Lake, MN February 27th, 1938 – January 6, 2026

Arlene Mae Opstad (Inderrieden) passed away at her home on Tuesday, January 6th. She was born in Little Falls, Minnesota on February 27th, 1938 and grew up in St. Cloud.

She graduated from Cathedral High School and went on to get a degree in teaching from St. Benedict's College. She worked for several years as an elementary school teacher.

In June of 1963, she was married to her husband and lifelong partner, Mel Opstad. They enjoyed 59 years of marriage together before his passing in 2022. In 1980, they adopted two sons from Colombia, Victor and Alex. She was full of devotion and love for her family, and was a truly dedicated wife, mother and grandmother until her last breath.

Arlene enjoyed artwork, sewing, cats, bird watching, and spending time with family and friends. She was well known for her skill in making

quilts and personalized Christmas stockings for all of her nieces, nephews, grandchildren and friends.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Mel Opstad; parents August and Frances (Schroeder) Inderrieden; and brothers John, Robert, and Richard Inderrieden. She is survived by her sons, Victor and Alex (Angela); grandchildren Michele, Damion, Trae, Lucas, Salina, Sadie, and Etta; and great-grandchildren Beckham, Ember, and Camilla.

Mass of Christian Burial was held Jan. 16 at 11 a.m. at Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church in Big Lake with visitation one hour prior to mass. Interment followed at Our Lady of the Lake Cemetery in Big Lake. Luncheon to was served after the interment at the church. Arrangements entrusted to Peterson-Grimsmo Funeral Chapel ~ Monticello. 763-295-2918. www.peterson-grimsmo.com.

Jerry Brunn, 87 Becker, MN August 3, 1938 – January 10, 2026

Jerry Brunn, age 87, of Becker, MN, previously of Brooklyn Park, MN, passed away peacefully at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, surrounded in love by his family.

Mass of Christian Burial was held at St. Mary of the Visitation in Big Lake, MN on Thur., Jan. 15 at 11:00 a.m., visitation from 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., recital of the Holy Rosary will be at 9:30 a.m. led by the Knights of Columbus, lunch at the church immediately after the service, and burial at St. Lawrence Cemetery in Duell, MN following lunch. Father Mike Kellogg and Father Nate Brunn will concelebrate Mass. With dignity provided by Foley Funeral Home.

Jerry was born August 3, 1938 in Foley, MN, the oldest son of 13 children of George and Gertrude Brunn. He married Carol (Jackels) Brunn on February 4, 1959, an amazing 66+ years. Jerry leaves a legacy of an entrepreneurial spirit having owned and operated Machined Parts Incorporated for over 35 years, a love of the outdoors, camping, hunting, fishing, and being out on the boat pulling grandkids skiing and tubing. Always a willing coconspirator for any reason to enjoy ice cream.

He loved taking meticulous care of his lawn, gardening, completing home projects, and helping others in mission work, community service and neighborly assistance.

Richard Lee Shanks, 73 Becker, MN January 26, 1952 – January 23, 2026

Celebration of Life will be at a later date at Bridgeview Assembly of God in Big Lake for Richard Lee Shanks, age 73, of Becker who died Friday at his home in Becker. Rev. Steve Royalty will officiate and burial will be in Oak Hill Cemetery, Santiago Township. Visitation will be one hour prior to the services.

Richard was born January 26, 1952 in Brainerd to George and Della (Swartout) Shanks. He married LaVanne Duerksen on July 27, 1974. The couple lived in St. Cloud and moved to Becker, in 1993. Richard was a Steam Fitter/

Welder for Excel and enjoyed target practice, flying in his powered parachute, and fishing where he received a Master Angler Award in Manitoba, Canada.

Survivors include his wife, LaVanne of Becker; children, Jenae (Bret Talbott) Shanks of Florida; Jason (Kelly Lynn) Shanks of Foley; Bob Shanks of Becker; grandchildren, Samson, and Chloe; brother, Gene (Vicky) Shanks of Brainerd. He was preceded in death by his parents.

Obituary and Guest Book available online: www.williamsdngiann.com.

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Derringer not seeking another term



Submitted Article

Wright County Sheriff Sean Derringer recently announced he will not be running for a third term as sheriff.

In a statement released last Friday, he said serving as sheriff has been one of the the greatest honors of his life.

He also noted faith, family, fellow law enforcement personnel, and the community as key to his success.

He also said he's encouraging Chief Deputy Matt Treichler to seek election and continue the work of leading the office with experience, integrity, and a deep commitment to public service.

Sheriff Derringer also said he looks forward to spending more time with family.

Mary Lou Lambert, 87 Becker, MN March 17, 1938 – January 7, 2026

Funeral Services were held at 11 a.m. on Jan. 15 at Williams Dingmann Family Funeral Home, Becker for Mary Lou Lambert, who passed away at Good Shepherd in Sauk Rapids. Visitation was from 4-7 p.m. on Jan. 14, and one hour prior to service at the funeral home.

Mary Lou (Unger) Lambert was born in St. Paul MN to John and Margaret Unger, later moving to Zimmerman MN. She married Phillip "Buster" Lambert in 1958 and they had five children. Mary Lou worked at the Sherburne County Social Services, with Anderson-Gilyard of Becker, as an accountant during the building of the Becker Power Plant, and as the associate manager of Kensington-Buffalo Hills in Buffalo MN.

Mary Lou was a woman before her time running for Sherburne County Commission in the 1970's. She had a determined spirit, teaching herself about football and bowling from the encyclopedia, getting her GED later in life, pursuing many hobbies such as painting, fishing, gardening, crafting, dancing, and raising chickens. Mary Lou had an insatiable curiosity, and thus became an avid reader, educating herself about the world around her. In her retirement years, she happily took on the role of homeschool grandma utilizing all of her knowledge and experience.

It was common that Mary Lou collected friends, including her children's friends through out the years. She was a feisty woman with many fun

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OBITUARIES

Mark David Dittmar, 71 Becker, MN April 14, 1954 – January 6, 2026

Mark David Dittmar passed away peacefully January 6th 2026.He was born April 14th 1954. To William and Audrey (Luther) Dittmar. Mark was born in Milwaukee Wisconsin where he served as a City Police officer and county deputy. While working as a police officer he met and married his loving wife Debbie of 42 years.

Mark is survived by his loving kids James and (Sarah) Dittmar, and Lydia and (Andrew) Kreager. Two Grandchildren August and Anneliese Dittmar. His brother Jeff Dittmar and sister Gail Santari-

ello. And many other relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents; Bill and Audrey Dittmar, in-laws Jim and Janet Boettcher, sister Jill Greinke, niece Karis Ann Ross, and brother in law Bill Santariello.

Services will be Saturday January 17, with visitation at 10 a.m., service to follow at 11 a.m. Pastor David Johnson will be officiating at Grace Lutheran in Becker; where Mark was a loyal congregation member since 1998.

William "Billy" R. Layer, 55 Clear Lake, MN March 1, 1970 – January 10, 2026

Mass of Catholic Burial will be 1:30 p.m. Saturday, January 17, 2026 at Catholic Church of All Saints in NE Minneapolis for William "Billy" R. Layer, age 55, who passed away Saturday at his home. Rev. Christopher Pelster will officiate and burial will be at St. John the Baptist Catholic Cemetery in Dayton. Visitation will be 5-8 p.m. Friday, January 16 at Williams Dingmann Family Funeral Home in Becker. Rosary will be at 7:40 p.m. Visitation will be one hour prior to service at the church.

Billy was born March 1, 1970 in St. Paul to William and Linda (Price) Layer. He married Nancy Scherping on October 4, 1996 at St. Odilia Catholic Church in Shoreview. Billy's profession was a Logistics Manager in transportation. He liked to bake, cook, make

dinner on the grill, especially when it included time with his family. Billy liked to spend time in the garden, go fishing and watch baseball games.

He is survived by his father of Blaine; his wife of 29 years, Nancy of Clear Lake; children, Jackson (Katherine) Layer of Mandan, ND, Aspen Layer (Alex Vaa) of Plymouth, Sebastian Layer of Plymouth, Simeon Layer of Clear Lake, and Magdalann Layer of Clear Lake; and grandchild, Kyrie.

He is preceded in death by his mother, and brother, Charles.

St. Joseph, Pray for us
St. Francis of Assisi, Pray for us

St. William, Pray for us
Obituary, Guest Book, and video tribute available online: www.williamsdngiann.com.



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Looking for a Great Place to Work?

Your **Community Development** department is in search of a full-time team member!

Community Development Coordinator Position

The City of Big Lake is seeking a dynamic and outgoing individual that will play a critical role in supporting planning, land use, and economic development activities that shape the City's growth and quality of life. This position plays a key role in development review, public engagement, and coordination with residents, developers, and elected officials. This is an exempt professional-level position for someone who is organized, analytical, and comfortable working with both technical planning issues and the public. Work is performed under the general supervision of the Community Development Director.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in Urban Planning, Public Administration, Geography, or a closely related field.
- One (1) year of experience in municipal planning, community development, or public administration preferred
- An equivalent combination of education and experience may be considered.

Benefits:

- Competitive salary based on experience
- Insurance, including Health, Dental, Life, disability insurances
- State Retirement plan
- Paid time off (vacation, sick leave, and holidays)
- Ongoing training and professional development opportunities

Pay rate is \$71,441.57 to \$90,500.04 Annually depending on qualifications

Application deadline is Thursday February 05, 2026, at 5:00 pm. Applications are available at Big Lake City Hall, 160 Lake St N, or on-line at www.biglakemn.org.

Please submit completed application form, cover letter, and resume to:

City of Big Lake
Community Development Coordinator
160 Lake St N
Big Lake Mn 55308

dwegeleben@biglakemn.org

Please reach out to Deb, at 763-251-2974 or you can email Deb at dwegeleben@biglakemn.org for more information.

EEOC. Posted January 5, 2026

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Looking for a Great Place to Work?

Your **Engineering** department is in search of a full-time team member!

Engineering Technician position.

The City of Big Lake is seeking a dynamic and outgoing individual that will play a critical role in maintaining and improving the infrastructure that keeps cities functioning smoothly, contributing to the quality of life for city residents. This position provides skilled technical support to the city engineer, city planners, and public works departments in designing, constructing, and maintaining municipal infrastructure projects. This role involves assisting in project planning, field surveys, drafting, and inspecting construction sites to ensure projects meet standards, specifications and regulations. Work is performed under the direction of the City Engineer with limited supervision.

Qualifications:

- Associates/Technical degree with Civil Engineering Technology or related field.
- Ability to demonstrate excellent communication, interpersonal, and teambuilding skills.

Benefits:

- Competitive salary based on experience
- Insurance, including Health, Dental, Life, disability insurances
- State Retirement plan
- Paid time off (vacation, sick leave, and holidays)
- Ongoing training and professional development opportunities

Pay rate is \$30.57 to \$38.73 per hour depending on qualifications

Application deadline is Thursday February 05, 2026, at 5:00 pm. Applications are available at Big Lake City Hall, 160 Lake St N, or on-line at www.biglakemn.org.

Please submit completed application form, cover letter, and resume to:

City of Big Lake
Engineering Technician position
160 Lake St N
Big Lake Mn 55308
dwegeleben@biglakemn.org

Please reach out to Deb, at 763-251-2974 or you can email Deb at dwegeleben@biglakemn.org for more information.

EEOC. Posted January 5, 2026

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BL wrestlers compete in Rick Lee Duals

*By Ken Francis,
Contributing Writer*

The Big Lake wrestling team saw lots of action at the Rick Lee Duals in Bemidji last Saturday. The Hornets didn't have a team victory, but some of the individual wrestlers did well.

Five Hornets won their matches against Bemidji.

At **121** pounds, Grant Volk beat Keaton Glynn, 10-8.

At **127** Alexa Guy pinned Landon Peterson at 3:06.

At **139**, Donovan Donner Pinned Caleb Arola at 3:54.

At **189**, Liam Mayer won by 18-2 tech fall over Tanner Littler.

At **215**, Austin Frederickson got a win by forfeit. Against Grand Rapids, Elijah Schaller had a forfeit win at **114** pounds.

At **145**, Noah Calgaro pinned Alex Grieger at 4:21.

At **152**, Rier Fox pinned John Holm at 1:31.

Vs. TRF

Against Thief River Falls, Elijah Schaller won by tech fall, 19-4 over Beckett Dufault at **114** pounds.

At **139**, Donovan Donner pinned Ian Lundeen at 4:30.

At **189**, Liam Mayer pinned Ian Hruby at 1:23.

At **215**, Austin Frederickson pinned Chandler Pream at 2:28.

At **285**, Henry Kuchera pinned Storm DCamp at 1:25.

Austin Frederickson had Big Lake's lone win against Brainerd at **215** pounds with a pin of Everett Patton at 1:26.

Up Next

The Hornets competed in a triangular meet at Chisago Lakes Thursday, results next week. They wrestle against 11 other schools at Howard Lake today (Saturday.)

Hornets improve to 7-3

*By Bill Morgan,
Editor*

The Big Lake boys basketball team improved to 7-3 on the season with two big wins this past week.

Vs. Princeton

The Hornets hosted the Princeton Tigers last Friday and came away with a 81-75 win.

Trevor Stuckenholtz led the Hornets with 22 points followed by Leroy Hamrin with 18, Judd Layton with 14 and Lane Pettis with 12.

Vs. Hutchinson

Monday, the Hornets

hosted Hutchinson and captured a decisive, 93-64 win. Leading the Hornets was Judd with 21, Stuckenholtz with 20 and Will Newland with 19.

Vs. Westonka

Tuesday, the Hornets traveled to Westonka and came home with an 80-71 victory.

Leading the Hornets was Lane with 30 points and Stuckenholtz with 21.

Up Next

Big Lake traveled up the road to Becker to take on the Bulldogs Friday night.

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Submitted Article

Stearns County residents can once again pick up free radon test kits while supplies last through the Environmental Services Department. Two hundred kits will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, with a limit of one kit per household. Kits go quickly, so don't wait!

Distribution begins Saturday, January 17, 2026. Most kits will be handed

out through the Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility drive-thru at 3601 5th Street South, Waite Park, which is open Monday-Saturday, 7:00 a.m.-5:15 p.m. A limited number of kits will also be available at the Environmental Services Department, located on the second floor of the Stearns County Service Center.

January is Radon Action Month, the perfect time to check your home for

radon gas. Radon is a colorless, odorless gas that occurs naturally in Minnesota soil and can enter homes through cracks in walls or foundations. When inhaled, radon releases radioactive particles that can damage lungs and cause lung cancer. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S., responsible for more than 21,000 deaths annually. Minnesota homes have significantly higher radon levels than the na-

tional average, with over 40% testing at dangerous levels. The state's geology and cold climate contribute to this, making testing essential.

Testing is the only way to know if your home has radon. It's easy, and if high levels are found, steps can be taken to fix the problem.

For more information or to check kit availability, contact Environmental Services at 320-656-3613.

Free radon test kits available for Stearns County citizens

PUBLIC NOTICES

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.

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 MAILING ADDRESS: **15455 59th, Becker, MN 55308 USA**
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 /s/ Steve Simon
 Secretary of State
 (Published in the *Patriot*: 01/17/26, 01/24/26).

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.)

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Sherburne County Waste Management Advisory Committee will be meeting on January 28, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will be held in the Maple Room located at the Sherburne County Government Center, 13880 Business Center Drive, Elk River, MN.

/s/ Maureen Mossak

Environmental Specialist

Planning and Zoning Administration

(Published in the *Patriot*: 01/17/26.)



4-H
 from page 1

Becker Public Cemetery Association

We will be holding our yearly meeting on January 21, 2026 at 7 p.m. at the Becker Community Center
 Published in the *Patriot* 01/10/26, 01/17/26.

competition. One of the most anticipated moments was the crowning of the Ambie Cane Champion. This year's title went to Eli Rademacher of Sauk Rapids, who earned the honor of taking home the Angel Cane trophy and having his name added to its history.

"I really enjoyed the games and the friendly competition," Rademacher said. "Events like this help us get to know each other better and even give us ideas for activities we can use at camps."

Close behind were Olive Thiessen of Foley, who impressed the group with her steady balance and careful control during the candy cane cup challenges, along with Ava Kolbinger and River Ferkinhoff, who rounded out the top finishers with determination and enthusiasm.

One of the highlights of the night was unwrapping two giant Saran Wrap balls



SWEET SUCCESS! Benton County 4-H Ambassador Eli Rademacher proudly shows off his trophy after being crowned the 2025 Ambie Cane Challenge Champion at Ambassador Candy Cane Night in Foley.. (Submitted Photo).

packed with prizes—while wearing oven mitts, of course. The laughter continued when the empty wrap balls were later transformed into playful "snowballs," keeping the

energy high well into the evening.

"Candy Cane Night was exciting and a lot of fun," said Ava Kolbinger, a 10th grader from Becker. "Activities like this really help with team building and give us a chance to meet new people and strengthen friendships."

Seventh-grader Kendall Micholski of Foley shared that one game stood out above the rest.

"My favorite activity was the marshmallow chopstick challenge," she said. "It was tricky, made everyone laugh, and was a great way to connect with others."

As the night wrapped up, ambassadors left with full hearts, big smiles, and fresh ideas for the year ahead. The Ambassador Candy Cane Night once again proved to be a sweet start to a new year, focused on leadership, teamwork, and connection within Benton County 4-H.

Mankato," stated Coach Nadia Fischer-Danzenen.

The team would also like to send best wishes to the following alumni competing at college nationals: Ashley Matvick, University of Minnesota. Hannah Oakes, Mankato State University. Liliana Simon, University of Minnesota-Duluth.

her off was a highlight for the girls. The B-squad Jazz, JV Jazz, and JV Kick teams then went on to compete at Foley and took first place in all three rounds.

"I'm very pleased with how they did coming off a break and competing without the leadership team with them as they all danced at

Becker dance takes 1st at Foley

By Maria Moore, Contributing Writer

Becker varsity jazz was awarded the opportunity to dance at the Mankato State University Send-Off Showcase.

One of Becker's alumni, Hannah Oaks, dances for MSU, so being able to send

Commissioners split on wine bar CU

By Ken Francis, Contributing Writer

In a split vote last week, the Sherburne County Board modified a number of conditions for a conditional use permit (CUP) for a wine bar in Santiago Twp.

The issue last came before the board in December. At that time, the board debated whether to revoke the permit due to violations, or modify some of the conditions of the CUP to clarify what was expected of the permit holder. They decided to send it back to the planning commissions for modifications.

Last week, those modifications were up for a vote. They included limiting the number of signs to one; removing additional parking spaces created without permits; requiring patrons to leave the area no more than 15 minutes after listed closing hours; limiting the number of employees to residents of the property or their adult

children.

Last Tuesday, members of the board each gave their opinion before the vote, with Commissioners Raeanne Danielowski, Andrew Hulse and Brad Schumacher in favor of modifying the conditions. Commissioners Gary Gray and Gregg Felber voted against.

CAMHI Grant

The board accepted and executed a contract for the 2026 Community Outreach Program Grant Award of \$168,329 from CAMHI (COMMUNITY Adult Mental Health Initiative). The grant will fund and provide resources and referral to those with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI) that are in the Sherburne County Jail, or those in the community with SPMI that are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Transportation Grant

The board approved a resolution in support of sponsoring the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) for Co. Rd. 23

improvements in the City of Becker. The county is working with the City of Becker to increase safety for all modes of travel along Co. Rd. 23 in the City of Becker.

The proposed project includes construction of approximately 1.3 miles of road and corridor improvements on Co. Rd. 23 from Hwy. 10 to south of Edgewood Street.

The total estimated project cost is \$3,668,727.79. The county is eligible to receive \$2 million in grant funding to complete the project, leaving a local cost share of \$1,668,727.79. The project is currently programmed in the county's five-year Capital Improvement Program, with the local match coming from a combination of Local Option Sales Tax, state aid and city funds. If the grant is approved, funding accounts will be created and amounts budgeted allocated in the year the project is constructed, anticipated to be 2029.

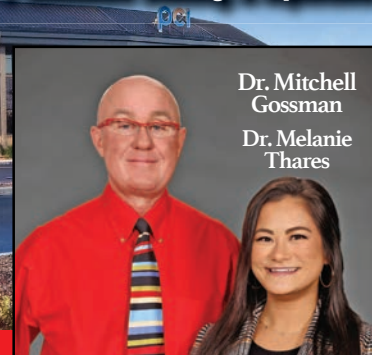
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Becker wrestling improves to 8-1

By Maria Moore, Contributing Writer

Becker Wrestling competed in the Rogers Holiday Matness Tournament recently.

There were 34 teams in attendance, and Becker took first place. Three Bulldog wrestlers showcased their skills and won their matches at the tournament.

At **107-lbs.**, Harper Hamacher, eighth grade, current record 9-1; At **127-**

lbs., Jacob Williams, 10th grade, current record 15-0; and at 145-lbs., Bennett Kujawa, 11th Grade, current record 10-1.

The six other wrestlers who placed at the tournament were: 114-lbs., fifth place - Odin Duncombe; 133-lbs., sixth place - Rylan Kujawa; 139-lbs., eighth place - Andy Fischer; 152-lbs., fourth place - Levi Thompson; 172-lbs., sixth place - Brayden Boots; and 215-lbs., seventh place -

Aiden Golley.

The team then went on to compete in a quadrangular meet in Dassel-Cokato where Becker defeated Dassel-Cokato/Litchfield 62-6 in the first round. Becker then defeated Eder Valley-Watkins, 56-15 in round two. To cap it all off, Becker defeated Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City 54-18 in the third round.

Becker gymnastics 3-0 In conference

By Maria Moore, Contributing Writer

Becker Gymnastics was able to move up to 3-0 in the Mississippi 8 Conference after competing strongly in four events against North Branch recently.

The team continues to get better even after losing two very strong teammates to injuries.

"I have been so impressed with this team in the way they have continued to improve with each week of the season," said Head Coach Jen Harmoning.

Recently, the team was

told that they qualified for the Class A True Team State Championships. The girls are ranked second among all Class A schools in the state, and they are excited to compete among the best.

At the North Branch Invitational, the team **su** it scores were as follows: first place - Maggie Graning (9.4); second place - Alyse Denne (9.075); fourth place - Chloe Spear (8.8) and fifth place - Lillian Bonsante (8.725).

Bar results were as follows: first place - Denne (8.9); second place - Graning (8.85); third place - Violet Johnson (8.025);

fourth place - Spear (7.95) and fifth place - Bonsante (7.25).

Beam results were as follows: first place - Graning (9.25); second place - Denne (9.2) and fifth place - Sabrina Jensen (8.95).

Floor results were as follows: first place - Graning (9.375); second place - Bonsante (9.275); third place - Denne (9.2); fourth place - Spear (9.025) and fifth place - Johnson (8.75).

All-Around results were as follows: first place - Graning (36.875); second place - Denne (36.375) and third place - Bonsante (33.925).

Eagles drop to 3-2 in conference

By Maria Moore, Contributing Writer

Becker/Big Lake competed against Rochester Mayo Spartans and the Austin Packers recently.

Vs. Rochester May

During the Spartans' game, senior Ray Clark scored a goal with an assist from senior Gavin Jacobson and junior Titus Borkoski.

The Spartans had gotten on the board first, so this goal squared up the score.

Another goal was scored by the Spartans to give them a 2-1 lead, which would continue to grow after the Spartans scored another goal in the second.

The Spartans would finish off the Eagles in the third with the final goal, making the final score 4-1.

Vs. Austin

Next up was the game against the Austin Packers and the Eagles were able to start the game off strong with a power play goal from senior Ethan Grafnitz



THE BECKER/BIG LAKE EAGLES gathered around their goaltender after the final horn in last week's loss to Austin. (Submitted Photo).

with assists from Clark and senior Tate Spilde. Senior captain Carter Tatge would go on to score an even-strength goal with assists from junior Brant Russin and senior Hayden Kipka to expand the lead to 2-0.

The second period was hard for the Eagles, with the Packers scoring five goals and the Eagles scor-

ing one goal by Spilde off a power play with assists from Grafnitz and senior Tanner Felton.

The third and final period is where the Packers scored their final two goals, giving Austin a 7-3 win.

Currently, the Eagles are 6-5 overall and 3-2 in the conference.