

North Crawford

Board supports exploration of charter school

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

North Crawford Elementary School Principal Amanda Killeen reported to the school board at the November 17 meeting about the district's effort to explore the possibility of transitioning the district's elementary school to a charter school format. This option would allow the district more flexibility in the school calendar, classroom format, and more, while still remaining part of a public school system.

Killeen told the board that she had been asked over the summer to look into the logistics of a charter school designation in the elementary school. She said the motivation is twofold – to increase enrollment by having unique offerings, and to be eligible for the \$800,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Alternatives desired

"We are facing the loss of students who are open enrolling out of the district to other districts that offer charter school alternatives, like the Viroqua Montessori or the La-Farge School District's Kickapoo Forest School," Killeen explained. "Exploring a charter school option for North Crawford could be a way for us to take a good elementary program and make it great."

Killeen said that given the small size of the district's school building, they would not be interested in having one room for each grade as the charter, and another room as a non-charter classroom. This would mean that the entire elementary would need to transition to the charter school format.

Killeen explained that the DPI offers grants for planning and implementation of new charter schools, or expansion of existing charter schools. The DPI grant is funded by a \$95 million grant received in 2017 from the U.S. Department of Education. Four-year grants of up to \$900,000 are available for planning and implementation, and grants of up to \$750,000 are available for replication or expansion of an existing charter school.

The charter school is:

- established by contract between an authorizer and charter school operator/governing board
- public
- publicly-funded
- tuition-free
- open to all, with voluntary attendance
- non-sectarian
- subject to/participates in major federal programs, eg. IDEA, Title I, etc...

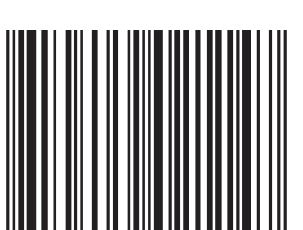
Charter schools:

- are flexible/innovative
- are exempt from many state laws
- foster environments of creativity
- take experimental approaches
- function as laboratories that influence the larger public school system
- are accountable
- are held to performance standards included in their contract
- are part of the state accountability system

"Certain statutes governing charter schools are different than for non-charter public schools," Killeen explained. "For instance, a charter school could have a farmer as a teacher, or could have a slightly different curriculum, for instance, one focusing on local history, to name a few examples."

Killeen says she plans to circulate a survey to parents to gauge stakeholder interest.

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THE HOME of Dustin Updike and Jackie Steele in Barnum was a total loss after a house fire on Saturday, Nov. 20. Crews from the Gays Mills, Eastman, Boscobel and Wauzeka fire departments battled the blaze overnight, and continued to address flare ups throughout the day on Sunday. Photo credit: Deanna Featherston Steines, who took the picture from the front porch of her home.

Two structures destroyed

Fire tragedy strikes in Barnum with family's home a total loss

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

As one of the most celebrated days of the year in Crawford County – opening day of gun deer season – was in full swing, when tragedy struck for the Updike-Steele family in Barnum, an unincorporated community in Haney Township. A house fire, with its cause 'under investigation,' destroyed the family home and another home five-feet away, in the late evening of Saturday, Nov. 20.

The second home is owned by a member of the Amish community, Amos, and by report, was being remodeled and listed for sale.

Neither structure was occupied at the time of the fire, but the Updike-Steele family, including, Dustin Updike, his fiancée Jackie Steele, and children Raiden, Hemi and Atlas, have lost their home and everything in it.

Raiden Steele, 18, is an alumni of North Crawford High School, and his brother Hemi, 16, is currently a student at the school. Both boys have been or are participants in the North Crawford-Seneca wrestling program.

Jackie's son Trea, 21, lives in the Carolinas and is enlisted in the National Guard. He is currently travelling home to be with the family. The couple also has a three-year-old son, Atlas.

Updike's sister, Christy Wehler, thanked the first responders who suited up to fight the fire. She says that at this point, financial contributions are the best way to help the family.

"They have a place to live, but must literally replace everything," Wehler said. "All the family has left is what they were wearing and driving last night."

Wehler has set up a 'Go Fund Me' account where donations can be made to help the family get back on their feet. To donate, go to: https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-updikesteales-recover-from-house-fire?utm_campaign=plico+share-sheet&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer

As of 6 a.m., on Monday, Nov. 21, \$6,075 of the \$5,000 goal had already been raised from community donations large and small.

A donation account has also been set up for the family at People's State Bank in Boscobel. To donate, send a check payable to the Updike-Steele House Fire Fund, to the bank at 1609 Elm Street, Boscobel, WI, 53805.

A bright note, according to Christy Wehler, is that the family dog, Mino, survived the fire. He was able to escape

the house, and was found on Sunday afternoon.

"They were so happy to have found the dog," Wehler said. "He was very afraid, but they finally found him, and he is exhausted and sleeping now."

Continued flare-ups

"We were paged out to the fire at about 9:45 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 20, and got back from the initial call about 6 a.m. on Nov. 21," Gays Mills Fire Chief Earl Winsor said. "Since then, we've been going out every two hours because there's a pile in the basement of the Updike-Steele structure that keeps reigniting, and we're going through between 1,000 to 1,500 gallons of water each time we go back."

Winsor described the measures needed for his department to fight the blaze.

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Verdict shocks defendant

Jury finds Kennedy guilty on all counts for a shooting in rural Eastman in 2019

By CHARLEY PREUSSER

Lee J. Kennedy was found guilty of all three felony charges at his jury trial in Crawford County Circuit Court on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021.

After the jury was polled and each juror affirmed their guilty vote on each charge, Kennedy slumped forward on the defense table and had a medical emergency.

Crawford County Sheriff's Deputy Elizabeth Volten stepped forward and began giving assistance to Kennedy. She asked Kennedy questions and tried to calm him by orienting him to his surroundings.

Crawford County Sheriff's Lieutenant Ryan Fradette used a manila folder as a fan to try to get air to the defendant. Others worked to get him upright in the chair and removed his outer shirt.

The jury, still seated in the jury box after being polled, watched the scene unfold in shock. At that point, Judge Lynn Rider told the jurors that they were free to leave and did not have to stay. All 12 jurors,

who had just spent almost seven hours deliberating, left immediately.

Becky Kennedy, Lee's wife, had fallen forward from her seat in the front row and laid on the floor pushed against the railing separating the front row from the defense table. She sobbed and was comforted by family members.

Lee Kennedy's mother leaned over the railing telling her son she was there for him.

Paramedics arrive

Tri-State Ambulance paramedics arrived and took over treating Kennedy. They connected him to a monitoring machine and began asking him questions.

A gurney from the ambulance was brought to the second floor courtroom and Kennedy was loaded onto it.

One paramedic was heard to remark that she thought Kennedy might be suffering from an anxiety attack.

The three felonies of which Kennedy was convicted include:

- first degree reckless injury—use of a dangerous weapon
- first-degree recklessly endangering safety—use of a dangerous weapon
- endangering safety by reckless use of a firearm

Cumulatively, Kennedy faces up to \$150,00 in fines and up to 57 years in prison.

Defense attorney Stephen Eisenberg stopped to make a brief statement, as he prepared

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ATTORNEY ADRIENNE BLAIS makes a point at the Lee Kennedy trial last week in Prairie du Chien. Blais is Wisconsin Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General, who teamed with Crawford County DA Lukas Steiner to win the case.

In Viroqua

Local artists open pop-up

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

A group of 16 local artists, many from Gays Mills and Soldiers Grove, have come together to form the Artisan Alley pop-up store in Viroqua. The move was spurred by their loss of venues with COVID-related cancellations of the Driftless Area Art Festival, the Winding Rivers Art Festival and more.

The store, located at 109 S. Main Street, next to Parrish Music, in Viroqua, is open at least for the next two months. Their hours are: Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon-4 p.m.

Gays Mills artist Harriet Behar spoke at a ribbon-cutting held for the store on Wednesday, Nov. 17.

"People tell me that I'm good at getting the ball rolling on projects, and I guess that must be true," Behar said. "We got the idea for this store because all of our venues for marketing and selling our artistic creations have been cancelled for the last two years, so we're very grateful to CouleeCap for their assistance in getting this store started."

Inventory already created

The artists had created inventory in anticipation of various planned events, only to see them cancelled for the second year in a row. A Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) grant to CouleeCap provided the seed money to help the artists open the store. The funding was made available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and was awarded to the store in Viroqua, as well as to the Market on Blackhawk Avenue, featuring 20 artists, in Prairie du Chien.

"We're very proud to welcome Artisan Alley to Viroqua's Main Street," Director of Viroqua Chamber of Commerce Chris Clemens said. "We are very happy to be using the WEDC/CouleeCap grant funds to support local artists who have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic."

Amanda Warthesen, Business and Income Developer with CouleeCap, explained that the \$1,500 in grant funds was used to help pay for a portion of the first two months of rent for the Main Street storefront. She said that the Viroqua Chamber of Commerce had also paid the security deposit on the space for the artisan group.

"I also want to thank Carol Roth of Driftless Development for her assistance in helping to make the initiative possible," Warthesen said. "Her assistance was invaluable in helping to bring people together to make this project possible."

Viroqua Mayor and 96th Assembly candidate Karen Mischel also attended the ribbon-cutting.

"This store has come about as a result of an awesome collaboration of groups in planning," Mischel said. "We are happy to welcome Artisan Alley to Viroqua, and very happy that we can help our local artisan community."

Artists and products

Behar explained that the artists whose work is featured at the store are all local artists, and were chosen as the result of a juried selection process. She said that the store is another option for holiday shoppers to purchase the products from local artisans, created in part because VIVA Gallery does not have space for additional vendors.

The artists and the products featured in the gallery are as follows:

Harriet Behar: Harriet has been a weaver since the mid-1970s, inspired by numerous trips to Central and South America, as well as the beauty of the landscape here in Southwestern Wisconsin. She creates sweaters, shirts, bags and items for the home using natural fibers including wool, cotton, silk and linen. Her garments are tailored to hang

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