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MAILING LABEL ONLY

Ashland paying superintendent more than \$150K to go away

BY PETER J. WASSON
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Ashland School District taxpayers are paying Superintendent Erik Olson his full salary of almost \$150,000 a year through June of 2022 and tens of thousands in other payments in exchange for his August resignation.

Those additional payments include full health, vision and dental insurance for him and his family, full contributions to his pension fund, reimbursement for graduate school classes, a \$10,000 deposit to his retirement account, \$7,000 to help him move to a new home, cash for



Olson

his unused vacation time and unemployment compensation.

The district also agreed to provide Olson with a positive letter of recommendation when he seeks a new job.

All that is outlined in a resignation agreement between Olson, who could not be reached for comment for this story, and the school district, obtained by the Daily Press under Wisconsin open records law.

The district announced in August that it was "separating" from Olson without explanation, and the documents obtained by the Daily Press do not specifically address the cause for the rift

between him and the board.

"You will not be required to perform any work duties for Ashland after the separation date..." the resignation deal with Olson says. "You agree that you shall reasonably cooperate with Ashland in coordination of the transition of your work and in the defense or prosecution of any claims or actions brought or threatened against or on behalf of Ashland.

"You will not be physically present at Ashland's offices except as may be arranged through the Department of Human Resources for the retrieval of personal property..."

Olson was hired in 2018 at a starting salary of \$144,000 a year. He came from West

Bend, where he also resigned as superintendent following an unspecified disagreement with that district's leaders.

The Ashland district announced his departure after a closed-door School Board meeting Aug. 11, and refused to disclose any additional information.

The Daily Press also received emails between board members regarding Olson's departure, but those emails initiated Aug. 13, two days after the meeting. Nothing in the documents obtained under open records law specifies how or why the closed session was convened or what led up to it.

SEE OLSON PAGE A5

WhistleStop returns to bay area



Ashland area Chamber of Commerce staff members Mary McPhetridge (left) and Sue Erickson load buckets of Maslowski Park artesian well water and cups for water stations along the 26-mile WhistleStop marathon and half-marathon courses between Ashland and Iron River. The event will take place Saturday after being cancelled last year. Rick Olivo/Staff photo

Pre- and post-race events still cancelled

BY RICK OLIVO
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After a year's absence, the WhistleStop marathon and half-marathon have returned to northern Wisconsin.

Following cancellation of the event for 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two fall running events, along with the companion Crusin the Corridor 5K and 10K runs, will come back to Ashland Saturday with full slates of runners in four races.

Race Director Mary McPhetridge said numbers of runners for all races were capped at about 1,800. She said some participants would be running virtually in their own communities to avoid crowds and then reporting results to WhistleStop officials.

While all of the races are back, WhistleStop festival events such as the pre-race pasta feed, awards ceremonies and the Blues and Brews Festival are still on hold as

the pandemic persists.

Still, McPhetridge found plenty of reason to be excited.

"I am thrilled because we have really good numbers," she said.

It was by no means a given that runners would return to the races following the COVID year of 2020.

"With a marathon, you really have to make the decision that you are either going to do the race or not early in the year, because you have to give the athletes time to train," McPhetridge said. "We had to decide in February whether we were going to go forward with it."

Organizers discussed with local health officials the best way to protect participants before making the decision to proceed.

"What we decided to do was to go forward with the race, however we would not have the pre-race events, like the pasta feed, and we would not have the post-race events like the

after-race party, the big awards ceremony and the Blues and Brews," McPhetridge said.

Instead of single events that draw large crowds, organizers opted to promote smaller events at local hospitality businesses.

The Neighborly Bar, for example, will host a WhistleStop Post-Race Bloody Mary Party that will include television coverage of the Wisconsin Badgers-University of Illinois football game.

Neighborly owner Jean Ronning said the goal of the outdoor party is to have a fun but safe event.

"We wanted to have something that was low-key but still fun to do," she said.

Another event will be Burger and bratwurst at the Tastes of Wisconsin store on Lakeshore Drive.

"It's just something to get people moving around downtown," said store manager Kati Henderson.

SEE WHISTLESTOP PAGE A5

Washburn begins bracing for reconstruction

BY RICK OLIVO
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Washburn officials and business owners got their first look Wednesday at a \$5.8 million plan to reconstruct Bayfield Street, the main route running through the hearts of the city.

The road will be rebuilt from the city's southern edge at Thompson Creek to Superior Street, near its northern boundary, in two sections. The southern portion will be completed from 2024 to 2025, and the northern section is scheduled for construction from 2026 to 2027.

Officials from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation discussed the project Wednesday at the Washburn Civic Center, and everyone involved agreed that rebuilding will cause challenges for local businesses and residents. Bayfield Street will be closed entirely in segments of one or two blocks at a time during construction.

"I'm concerned about the traffic detour, basically, and how it is going to affect my business," said Randy Daigle, owner of CR Treasures on Bayfield Street.

Daigle said after attending the meeting that he was encouraged by the DOT plans for the project.

"I am liking the two-block detour idea, instead of the whole thing being detoured for the whole summer," he said.

Daigle said that approaching the rebuilding in short segments of 45 days or less instead of ripping up the street all at once limited the time any one business would have serious access problems for customers.



Daigle

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