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LUHS student disciplined following football game

Video of him starting a 'F- - - Joe Biden!' chant at Oct. 8 game against Ashland went viral

Editor's note: The Lakeland Times has the names of the student, his mother and her fiancé who was interviewed for this story but because the student is a minor, their names are not being published.

By Brian Jopek
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Chants of "F- - - Joe Biden!" gained acceptance at college and National Football League football games during the first few months of the 2021 football season.

They also appeared locally at the high school level on at

least one occasion.

On Oct. 8, during the Lakeland Union High School Thunderbird homecoming game against Ashland, the chant was begun by a 15-year-old LUHS student and captured on video, which went viral on social media.

No action was taken against the student at the time

but afterward, there was an investigation and a police report dated Oct. 13 by Minocqua police officer Kaleb Punzel, the LUHS's resource officer, signed by Minocqua police chief Dave Jaeger.

In his report, Punzel stated he was on patrol for the game "when a chant from the student section started" and

though difficult to hear, he said "I heard them say, 'F- - - Joe Biden.'"

"Contact with a game supervisor was made after a brief stint with the chant," he wrote in his report. "The supervisor was asked if they could identify who the originator of the chant was so they could be es-

See **Discipline.** . . page 7



TREVOR GREENE/LAKELAND TIMES

Northwoods residents and welcomed visitors watch a red hot firework explode in the night sky during the New Year's Eve Celebration outside of the fire barn on Friday, Dec. 31 in Woodruff.

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Oneida County tourist rooming house 'task force' discusses ordinance violators

Software would offer county staff tools to aid compliance issue

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Oneida County officials have recently made issues with tourist rooming house operations a priority, establishing a "task force" to combat widespread compliance, or non-compliance, problems as they relate to tourist rooming houses.

The primary issue? People who use their dwellings as tourist rooming houses without proper permits and licenses violating Oneida County ordinances in the process.

Following the task force's first meeting in November, county supervisor Billy Fried told the *The Lakeland Times* it's about more than the money.

It is, he said, about "being consistent."

"For those who are licensed, who are paying room tax, who are paying sales tax, they are playing on a different playing field than the others, and as supervisors we've seen recently where people come for-

See **Task force.** . . page 16

Wegner guilty of disorderly conduct, acquitted on battery charge

Global resolution of remaining cases to be explored

By Jamie Taylor
OF THE RIVER NEWS

A Lincoln County jury needed about 90 minutes Thursday to reach a verdict in the disorderly conduct and battery trial of former Oneida County assistant planning and zoning director Peter S. Wegner.

The jury decided that Wegner committed disorderly conduct in a Feb. 7, 2019 incident involving a Town of Russell snowplow driver, but found him not guilty of battery. The panel heard testimony from the snowplow driver, a passenger who was in the plow truck with him, Wegner's brother-in-law and the defendant himself.

In his opening statement, Lincoln County assistant district attorney Kurt Zengler said the incident stemmed from Wegner's mailbox being knocked over by the plow driver in the course of doing his job on Feb. 6. The two exchanged text messages, some containing profanities and unsubstantiated accusations. The last exchange occurred about 90 minutes before the Feb. 7 incident.

"He (Wegner) started out insulting, and (the driver) responded in kind," Zengler said of the exchange, which he described as like two middle school boys threatening each other.

At about 7 p.m. on Feb. 7, 2019 Wegner cut off the snow plow and got out brandishing a baseball bat. Zengler said Wegner demanded the driver get out of the truck. At some point Wegner approached the driver's side of the vehicle.

"He (Wegner) was able to get the door open," Zengler said. "And he started yanking on him, trying to get him out of the truck. He actually struck him with the baseball bat."

The prosecutor told the jurors they would hear the recording of the driver's 9-1-1 call, where Wegner can be heard

See **Wegner.** . . page 8

SNOW SLIDE

Syd Gavronski works on constructing a slide out of snow as her father Matt watches with a smile during the North Lakeland Discovery Center Winter Family Play Day festivities on Wednesday Dec. 29 in Manitowish Waters.

TREVOR GREENE/
LAKELAND TIMES



Discipline

From page 1

corted from the premises. They were unable to identify who started the chant.”

Punzel in his report said contact with LUHS principal Chad Gauerke was made the next week “as he had received notice from multiple people about the behavior displayed by LUHS students during the game.”

“I had also received notice from multiple people about the behavior displayed by LUHS students during the game,” he wrote. “I had also received notice from adult fans with children stating the behavior of the student section was very distracting and the profanity disturbing.”

Punzel said Gauerke provided a video of the student section “showing the chant in action.”

From information Gauerke received, Punzel wrote, the student “in charge” of the chant was shown starting it and was brought to Gauerke’s office.

He wrote the attitude of the student during the discussion with Punzel in Gauerke’s office regarding the behavior at the football game, “changed immediately” when he began to speak.

“I started a chant earlier and my friend said I should start another chant,” the student told Punzel. “So I didn’t even think about what I was saying.”

Punzel said in the narrative Gauerke told the student “that this kind of conduct was unacceptable at LUHS” and the student would be serving a suspension “for this violation.”

Punzel wrote the student was “very upset” with his actions and “was advised” the police department would be looking into the incident further.

In addition to the student serving what the fiance of the student’s mother described as a three-and-a-half-day suspension, a week after Punzel and Gauerke spoke to the student in Gauerke’s office, on Oct. 20, the student received in person a disorderly conduct citation and fine of \$326.50 with his court date scheduled for Dec. 2, 2021.

In court on Dec. 2, the fiance said the \$326.50 disorderly conduct citation was dismissed but the student was ordered to serve 13 hours of community service instead.

Prior to that was a meeting on Oct. 27 arranged by the fiance he attended with the student and his mother with Gauerke, LUHS interim administrator Dr. Claire Martin and Punzel.

Many different ways

The fiance of the student’s mother said he and the boy’s mother acknowledge her son starting the chant at the LUHS football game on Oct. 8 was something he shouldn’t have done.

At the same time, he said “the school screwed up in so many different ways.”

To begin with, he said his fiancee, the student’s mother, is identified with LUHS as a “primary” contact; she has joint, 50/50 custody of the boy with his father.

“She’s supposed to be a primary that gets notified,” he said. “They (LUHS) never notified her. I find out while I’m sitting on a mountain out in Idaho elk hunting.”

He said he found a spot where he could get cell phone reception and heard from his parents who’d heard “through the grapevine” his stepson to be had been suspended for starting the chant at the Oct. 8 LUHS Thunderbird football game.

“Of course, we (he and his fiancee) didn’t believe it because it sounded so asinine,” the fiance said. “Turns out, yes, he did get suspended for three-and-a-half-days which I thought, you know, giving kids suspensions is probably the dumbest thing a school could ever do. Why give kids time off for something they did wrong? Make them do something at the school as punishment instead.”

The fiance said the boy should have told his mother as well.

“He didn’t,” he said. “You know, split households, things slip by, whatever.”

He said the \$326.50 citation was something “I was losing my mind over.”

“Last year, there were kids on the high school golf team that were, and I like the kids, too, but they were out knocking over mailboxes. They end up with a \$50 ticket out of it. That was a federal offense they committed. Here’s (his fiancee’s son) starting a chant with a swear word, a political chant. I could care less what side you’re on. If it was anti-Trump, anti-Biden, either way. Whatever it was, it was started.”

The fiance said one of the items discussed in the Oct. 27 meeting with Gauerke, Brown and Punzel, was making Gauerke and Brown aware the boy’s mother hadn’t been notified.

“They claimed they didn’t have her in the system when she was definitely in the system because we do get his report cards and that sort of stuff,” he said. “Magically, though, we get the disorderly conduct ticket mailed to us here in Minocqua but they didn’t have her contact information. How do they have that discon-

nect in the front office that can’t be corrected?”

He said Gauerke mentioned in that meeting “the threat of expulsion if this behavior kept up” which the fiance contends never should have been brought up.

“You threaten the drastic punishment but settle for the lesser one even though the lesser one was still not fair in my eyes,” he said.

The fiance said Gauerke has mentioned to him and the student’s mother he had “come down a little harsh” on the boy.

“The disorderly conduct had already been issued, the suspension already served,” he said. “Let’s just make sure he (the student) was taken care of and teachers wouldn’t hold a grudge against him for what he did.”

One other item discussed at that Oct. 27 meeting was activities the 15 year old could become involved in and he subsequently re-joined the LUHS wrestling team.

“That was something he enjoyed,” he said. “Let’s give him the support so he’s not causing mischief.”

The fiance told the *Times* what hadn’t been discussed at the Oct. 27 meeting and what the student’s mother wasn’t informed of until later was another suspension of the student from four wrestling matches by LUHS administration for starting the chant at the football game. That was 25% of the matches he would be eligible to participate in.

“I mean, we sat in that room (on Oct. 27) and talked about all this punishment,” the fiance said. “They never brought that (the four-match suspension) up. So, this kid gets a \$326.50 citation, three-and-a-half-day suspension from school and suspended from four wrestling matches.”

He said he talked to LUHS athletic director Emily Mallek, explained the situation and Mallek reinstated two of the student’s wrestling matches.

“She said, and I actually agree with this, he should have been suspended from any athletics he was in,” he said. “He made a mistake and there should be repercussions. As far as the school and the three-and-a-half-day suspension, I think that was overkill ... to have the suspension, the citation and now the four match suspension, it’s like kicking the kid when he’s down and there’s no precedent for it.”

No policy, no precedent

LUHS does have a “Code of Conduct” for students but the fiance contends “it’s pretty vague” little, if anything, in it regarding a student

engaging in a political activity involving the use of profane language or a set policy in place at this time outlining how a student was to be punished for violating the LUHS code of conduct.

That, said one LUHS school board member, is something the board of education’s policy committee is working on.

Mallek, said the fiance, was the “only one who had any common sense” or was willing to listen.

He disagrees with LUHS administration on the nature of the chant.

“It is a political chant,” he said. “They (LUHS) tried saying ‘No, this has nothing to do with politics.’ It absolutely does. You know when you go to a high school basketball game and you hear a ‘B- - - - t!’ chant toward the refs ... the teachers and the hall monitors and the staff are up in the stands, writing tickets to kids. They may get in trouble, may get a detention here or there, which is appropriate.”

The kids, he said, are allowed to express their political beliefs.

“Most of ‘em can’t even vote,” he said. “So, it’s not a big deal. They’re 14-year-old, 15-year-old, 17-year-old, 18-year-old adolescents.

They’re gonna say stuff that they don’t know a lot about. They do it because of their parents’ political affiliations. They see it (chanting) going on at basketball games, college football games, they see it on TV. The guys are yelling these chants and they’re gonna duplicate that.”

As for what the fiance and the boy’s mother want out of all this?

“My problem is I don’t want to see another kid do this and end up with the same punishment,” he said. “It doesn’t fit. I don’t know if they’re trying to use him (his fiancee’s son) as an example or what to get this done. If this is the precedent, then fine. They (LUHS staff) should go to every game and write tickets to kids for swearing and if they start yelling ‘B- - - - t!’ at the refs because they think they made a bad call, you better be up there suspending kids, kicking them out of 25% of their athletic seasons. The police department better be there issuing disorderly conduct citations. If that’s the precedent they want to set, I think that’s chaotic and moronic at the same time.”

Gauerke was asked for comment but declined, saying the matter involved a minor.

“I’m sorry but I like my job,” he said.

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