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Lindoo, 10th, Summit

City council OKs seeking bids for street projects

By Luke Klink

The Ladysmith Common Council took several votes last week that advance three planned street reconstruction projects on portions of Lindoo and Summit avenues and E. 10th Street. The decisions at the council's Monday, Jan. 10 meeting, authorizes the engineering firm Morgan & Parmley to advertise for construction bids.

The council voted 7-0 for E. 10th Street from Menasha to Park avenues, 4-3 for Lindoo Avenue from E. Fourth to E. Sixth and 6-1 for the Summit Avenue cul-de-sac.

Bids must be advertised by the first week of February to meet timelines. Contracts must be awarded by the end of March to be eligible for low interest water loans through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

"None of these projects qualify for the principal forgiveness but they all qualify for the low interest loan funding," Public Works Director Kurt Gorsegner said. "In order to keep that timeline going, now is the time to advertise that bid."

While advertising for two projects were approved overwhelmingly, the Lindoo Avenue project mainly along the south side of the city's community center passed on

a narrower decision.

Morgan & Parmley already has been contracted to oversee the project and designing plans. This latest motion is only to seek bids.

Advertising does not mean the bids must be accepted.

Council members discussed possible cost savings, mainly for Lindoo Avenue if the city public works department did some of the work.

Gorsegner called sewer and water on this part of Lindoo Avenue "ancient" and its storm sewer is "collapsing."

The storm sewer is right below the street surface, heaving the asphalt in the winter and limiting construction material options. Relocating it into the boulevard would solve some of these issues.

"I think some of these projects we should look in depth and see what we can do to help ourselves. It is not a big project at all," Ald. Bill Morgan said.

During city budget planning, it was assumed DNR loans would help finance most of Lindoo, Summit and E. 10th construction. The city's general fund was earmarked for Flambeau Avenue work also being planned with grant applica-

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Pioneer spirit in downtown Ladysmith



BUILDING SOLD — The former Pioneer Bank of Wisconsin building in downtown Ladysmith is getting a new owner with the December sale to Tyrel Sikora of Cornell. Story on Page A12.

— News photo by Luke Klink



SEMI CRASH — The Wisconsin State Patrol and Rusk County Sheriff's Department responded to a three vehicle crash at 12:24 p.m., Jan. 17 near the intersection of U.S. 8 and Historic Road, Weyerhaeuser. Subaru driver Dale Czekalski was preparing to turn southbound onto Historic Road when he was struck by a dump truck driven by Mark Schwarzhuber. Both Czekalski and Schwarzhuber crossed over and into the eastbound lane of U.S. 8 with Czekalski entering the south ditch. Prior to entering the ditch, Schwarzhuber struck the front right corner of an oncoming semi truck driven by Daniel Parroni. All three vehicle sustained disabling damage. No major injuries were sustained by those involved in the crash. Also responding to the crash were Weyerhaeuser Fire Department, Weyerhaeuser First Responders and Rusk County Ambulance. Citations are pending at this time.

— News photo by Jerilea Hendrick

Ryan Korver: 'But as the weeks wore on, it wasn't funny anymore'

Family describes being taken hostage in Haiti

By Luke Klink

One month has passed since an Ohio Christian mission agency announced its members, including a Rusk County family of four, successfully escaped from armed captors in Haiti.

Since, then the Rusk County father is speaking publicly about their captivity, enduring faith and deliverance.

Ryan and Melodi Korver and their children, Andre, 3, and Laura, 10 months were among the hostages taken on Oct. 16 as part of a missionary group from Christian Aid Ministries of Ohio. The family, who was in Haiti for the first time and 6-1/2 months total, attends Shiloh Mennonite Church southwest of Conrath.

The captive families were from Amish, Mennonite and other Anabaptist communities in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Ontario, Canada. Two were released last November and three more were set free on Dec. 5, but most of the hostages spent almost two months in captivity before being flown out of the country on Dec. 16.

According to Christian Aid Ministries officials, the 12 remaining hostages plotted their escape and they felt "God calling them to leave."

Ryan recently addressed the Shiloh Mennonite Church congregation, speaking for 2-1/2 hours. A recording of his account was obtained by the Ladysmith News.

Ryan's nearly three-hour account is more extensive than but not contradictory to that of the ministry's narrative given by spokesman Weston Showalter days before Christmas soon after all the hostages were back in the U.S.

Ryan hoped his first-hand account of what happened would accurately describe the events that took place, but at the same time not frighten others away from leaving the comfort of home to go where God calls. He thanked the home congregation for their prayers, adding the hostages received little information about what was happening in the outside world and with their families back

Part 1 of 3 parts, captivity to freedom



LEAVING HAITI — Fifteen of the hostages are photographed before leaving Haiti. The last 12 hostages escaped their armed gang captors, trekking nearly 10 miles through wilderness, briars and gang territory before realizing their freedom. Many of the group are now speaking publicly in their hometowns, offering first-hand accounts of events. Among them are Ryan and Melodi Korver, who attend Shiloh Mennonite Church southwest of Conrath.

— Christian Aid Ministries photo

They had a small white pick-up, and they overtook us. They got around us, cut us off and hit the brakes. We had no choice but to pull off, and by then we were staring down the barrels of four assault rifles.

— Area resident Ryan Korver, one of 17 taken hostage

home.

While threatened at times by armed guards, they also experienced moments of inspiration through sights of beautiful sunsets and brilliant rainbows or an almost miraculous recovery by a hostage's serious health issue.

The gang

Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, holds the grim record

of the world's highest kidnapping rate per capita, according to *Washington Post* reporting. One gang — 400 Mawozo — was responsible for 80 percent of abductions in Haiti from June through September, according to Gédéon Jean, director of the Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights in Port-au-Prince. Haitian officials say the group was behind the Christian Aid Ministry kidnapping, too.

From Creole, the gang's name loosely translates to "400 simpletons," or "400 inexperienced men." But the group is widely feared for using rape and assassination to maintain its grip on Haitian streets, businesses and power players. It has also been associated with extortion and a new trend of mass kidnappings from cars and buses. And it has targeted clergy and churches — a red line for many in the Catholic-majority Caribbean nation.

Why did they go?

Ryan described Haiti as a poor country with its people in desperate need, and the congregation as a group of individuals trying to do the best they can to help.

"[The country] is all beautiful, but in reality, at least around the big cities, it can be a violent place with a lot of gangs and very weak governments. The police are scared of going certain places and doing certain things for fear of angering the local gang leaders. It is a lot of lawlessness," he said.

Ryan added he understood why some might question, why go there, especially with their young family.

"I know I wondered the same thing sometimes, but it was a good experience for us and for me. God took us through a number of experiences we weren't asking for necessarily, but working with the team we had down there and the way things were done, it was a blessing," he said.

Ryan said the missionaries witnessed amazing things, calling the experience a blessing and a time of personal growth despite the volatile environment.

"You stay close to God. You don't want to be living in defeat. You don't want to let your relationship with God grow cold," Ryan said.

The Korvers are not alone in speaking publicly now about the ordeal.

Dale Wideman, a 24-year-old missionary from southwestern Ontario who was the only Canadian, told *Nation*

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BBB sends alert on COVID test scams

The US Food and Drug Administration is warning people of fraudulent coronavirus tests, vaccines, and treatments as the pandemic continues. According to the Centers for Disease Control, since the arrival of the Omicron variant, the increase of testing for COVID-19 has become a concern. Scarcity often leads to potential scams for a product that doesn't exist, the compromise of personal identifiable information, or the increase of deceptive advertising.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued a warning earlier this year about potential fraud related to the antibody tests. Scammers are selling unapproved COVID-19 antibody tests, which can give inaccurate results. In doing so, they are also collecting personal information, such as Social Security numbers and dates of birth. They may also be stealing health insurance or Medicare information that can be used in future schemes.

How the Scam Works

Robocalls are sent out to consumers directing them to a website that looks like a clinic or medical supply company offering COVID-19 tests. These tests allegedly identify if a person has been infected

with coronavirus – even if they've recovered. Some even promise results in 10 minutes. However, to receive a test, a credit card or a form needs to be completed with personal information.

In some cases, the test involves an easy at-home testing kit. Other times, the tests are allegedly offered through a clinic. But in all versions, the person or website selling the test is short on details. They aren't willing or able to provide any information about how the test works, where it is sourced, and what laboratory processes it.

Don't fall for it! These tests are not US Food and Drug Administration approved and will not give accurate results. In fact, requestors may never even receive an actual test kit. Either way, scammers will have made off with the money and personal information.

How to Avoid Fake Coronavirus Tests

- Want a test? Talk to your doctor. Reach out to your healthcare provider. They can help figure out if the test will be covered by insurance and where to find a legitimate clinic. If you don't have a primary care physician, check out the official website of your local health department for more information.
- Check claims of FDA approval. Per the FBI, "Not all COVID-19 antibody tests have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and their efficacy has not been determined." Check the FDA website for a list of approved tests and testing companies.

on testing availability.

■ Research before buying. Scammers put pressure on people to buy or commit without giving them time to do further research. Before agreeing to anything, investigate first. Research any claims the company makes. Start with searching BBB.org to see they are BBB Accredited, have good reviews, and if there are complaints or scam reports associated with their business name. In addition, review the warnings on FBI, Federal Trade Commission, Attorney General's office, and BBB ScamTracker.

■ Understand all options: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a detailed guide to testing for COVID-19. Understand the different tests available.

■ Never share your personal information with strangers. Only make purchases and share your personal information with people and companies you know and trust.

■ Check claims of FDA approval. Per the FBI, "Not all COVID-19 antibody tests have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and their efficacy has not been determined." Check the FDA website for a list of approved tests and testing companies.



HAITI — Haiti is 10,714 square miles in size, the third largest country in the Caribbean by area, and has an estimated population of 11.4 million, making it the most populous country in the Caribbean. The capital is Port-au-Prince. — Google Maps image

Haiti: Hostages daringly escape armed guards

Continued from Page A1

World News he believes God called him to go to Haiti. He said his job with the missionary group was to transfer medicines and other supplies to Haitian clinics, and to keep a list of other donated items such as food boxes, hygiene kits and school books.

Wideman was driving when a swarm of trucks surrounded the van — first cutting off access to the road in front of them, then blocking the road behind them.

The gang members got out of the truck and walked to Wideman's door.

"They kicked me out of the van, hit me and threw me in a different vehicle," he recalled. "Many things were running through my mind, but I remember thinking: 'That's it, they'll take me into the countryside, shoot me and throw my body in the bushes.'"

He prayed. He thought of his family, and wished he could talk with them.

"I asked God to allay my fears, I was ready to die if this happened," he stated.

Austin Smucker of Madras, Ore., told the *Portland Tribune* being kidnapped in a foreign country would demoralize most people but it seems to have left him invigorated.

Smucker, 27, a construction worker, went to Haiti in October with Christian Aid Ministries to rebuild homes after the August earthquake there.

"I believed in prayer when I went down there," Smucker told the *Madras Pioneer*, sister publication to the *Portland Tribune*, "but I believe in prayer more since I came back."

The calling

Word came from Christian Aid Ministries last October it was time for its members in Haiti to visit an orphanage CAM sponsors in Haiti. They were going to interview and photograph about 18 children to help relay CAM's good work back home.

Members of the group who were going stood in a circle. They committed the date to the Lord. They prayed. They asked for His protection. They loaded up a 15-passenger Toyota van they nicknamed "The Bus." The compact vehicle was crammed full with supplies and 17 people, including a CAM medical director and warehouse director.

On the way to the orphanage the group passed smoldering remnants of burning tires police had pushed to the roadside, likely from an earlier roadblock. It was an area where Ryan had seen a roadblock before with vehicles parked sideways in the roadway, so it wasn't out of the ordinary.

"We kind of knew that this was an area that tended to be a problem," Ryan said.

At the orphanage, they met the director and played with the children. The facility was described by Ryan as neat and clean with well-behaved children.

The way back

About 1 p.m., the group boarded the "The Bus" for the ride back home.

The way back would be the same as before, through the area they saw gang activity earlier.

"All of a sudden there was a roadblock in front of us. There was a box truck and a pickup crossways in the road with no way to get around it," Ryan said.

The driver slammed on the brakes. He stayed as far back as he could. He pulled a quick U-turn in the road and headed back in the direction they had come.

He was doing the best he could to get out of there, according to Ryan.

But the gang was after them.

"They had a small white pick-up, and they overtook us. They got around us, cut us off and hit the brakes. We had no choice but to pull off, and by then we were staring down the barrels of four assault rifles," Ryan said. "These guys were in the back of the truck aiming in the windshield at us with ski masks and yelling. It was quite intimidating."

Gang members glared through windows, opened the vehicle's side doors and gave the occupants a good look-over.

"I didn't understand much of what they said, and I don't think they said much," Ryan said. "They were telling us they wanted our phones, and they wanted our money."

Group members felt the gang wasn't overly demanding so they were not overly compliant with handing over their valuables.

Gang members suddenly were mentioning the group through. They also felt fortunate to be able to head back in the direction they were originally from.



LOCAL FAMILY — Ryan and Melodi Korver and their children, Andre, 3 years, and Laura, 10 months, were among the hostages. — Christian Aid Ministries photo

They were free to go, they thought.

Taken hostage

Minutes later, they were face-to-face with the same roadblock.

"The Bus" was diverted onto a side road. It was pinned between two other vehicles, one ahead and one behind.

"They forced us to stop and yanked [the driver] out of the driver's seat and threw him in their vehicle and put one of their guys in [our vehicle] to drive," Ryan said.

"The Bus" was being driven faster and faster on the rough road. The missionaries began to sing. Passengers were hitting their heads on the roof. The driver was slapping at the roof, ordering passengers to be quiet.

"I think I spent more time with my hair plastered to the top of the van than I did with my rear on the seat I was supposed to be sitting on," Smucker told the *Madras Pioneer*.

The bus traveled "quite a way off the highway" before coming to a clearing.

"There were lots of gang members there. Lots of guns," Ryan said.

The hostages were attempting to hide phones and cash in a baby's diaper bag, when a guard stuck his head inside the vehicle and threatened to kill the hostages if any hidden phones were discovered.

"At that point I thought it would be a good idea as I didn't think my phone was worth that much," Ryan said.

They handed over their phones, but they were allowed to keep their wallets, IDs, credit cards and a small sum of Haitian money. This action would become invaluable weeks later, during their escape.

"They wanted all our money and our phones. They told us they would kill us if we were hiding anything," Smucker said, "but they were drunk or on drugs. So, I don't know if they meant that."

The missionaries were herded out of the van and lined up. They sang as gang members took video, perhaps for use as propaganda.

The driver, who had been pulled from the vehicle earlier, was returned.

"We were thankful to be able to stay together," Ryan said.

Where they stayed

The group was herded into a 2-room house with a porch on the front and side. The first night they were all crammed into a single room. Gang members slammed the door, propped a stick against it and rolled a rock in front of that.

"There we were. We started to realize what they had in mind," Ryan said. "We had a double mattress and two singles. That was all we had room for.

Use caution when contracting for wind damage repairs

The severe weather in Wisconsin last month resulted in damage to homes and businesses throughout the state. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) reminds property owners to use trusted contractors for repairs and to be leery of storm chasers that come knocking with aggressive sales tactics.

Always use caution when interacting with traveling crews who show up in the aftermath of a storm. Do not let them into your home, and do not give in to high-pressure pitches. Instead, use trusted sources such as your friends, neighbors, and insurance agent for contractor referrals.

You can also contact DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128 to check for complaints against a business before you sign a contract.

Homeowners with storm damage should:

- Be wary of any contractor who knocks at your door. If your municipality has a door-to-door sales ordinance, call municipal officials to find out if the contractor holds the proper permits.
- Get lien waivers from anyone you pay for home repairs. If the person collecting your money does not

pay their supplier or worker, a lien could be put on your property.

■ Get a written contract with exactly what work will be done, what materials will be used, a start and completion date, and warranty information.

■ Check with your local building inspector to see if the work requires a permit and make sure an inspector visits the job site before you provide final payment.

■ Request a copy of the contractor's certificate of liability insurance.

■ Keep all receipts that document the cost of repairs or the replacement of damaged items.

In addition, Wisconsin's storm chaser law aims to protect consumers and businesses, and prevent insurance fraud through the following:

■ Contractors cannot promise to pay all or some of a property insurance deductible.

■ Contractors cannot negotiate with a homeowner's insurer on behalf of the customer. They can only discuss damages and costs with the insurer with the customer's permission.

■ Before entering into a contract with a customer, the contractor must inquire if the work requested is related to an insurance claim.

■ Customers have a right to cancel the contract within three business days of being notified that their insurer has denied all or any part of the claim for work. Contractors must notify customers of this right.

For additional information and consumer protection resources, visit DATCP's Consumer Protection Bureau at datep.wi.gov. If you have been the victim of a scam, report it by filing a complaint online, emailing dataprotline@wisconsin.gov, or calling DATCP's Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128.

BBB says don't share vaccine card on social media

Now that Covid-19 vaccination recommendations for pediatric and teen populations have been extended, and as those restrictions continue to be lifted and change and it rolls out to more individuals around the country, BBB reminds people not to share a photo of your vaccination card on social media.

Remember, even a minimal amount of self-identifying information makes you vulnerable to identity theft and can help scammers create phony versions of the cards. There have even been reports of scammers offering fake vaccine cards for sale.

The personal vaccine card has self-identifying information on it including your full name, birth date and information about where you got the vaccine. If your social media settings aren't set high, you may be giving valuable information away making you vulnerable to scams. And that information is exposed for others to use to create and sell phony cards.

BBB recommends that you share safely on social media and offers tips:

■ Share your vaccine sticker or use a profile frame instead. If you want to post about your vaccine, there are safer ways to do it. You can share a photo of your vaccine sticker or set a frame around your profile picture.

■ Review your security settings. Check your security settings on all social media platforms to see what you are sharing and with whom. If you only want friends and family to see your posts, be sure that's how your privacy settings are configured.

■ Be wary of answering popular social media prompts. Sharing your vaccine photo is just the latest social trend.



Green Bay Party
on January 22nd
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