

## » FISHING

FROM PAGE A1

Laurie Soderlund made it her mission to do what she could to focus attention on the need to understand breast cancer and for women to undergo early screening. The group that formed around the idea of increasing consciousness about breast cancer evolved into the fishing competition, in which early breast cancer detection is a strong theme.

The project caught on with the community, and when Laurie Soderlund suffered a relapse and became too ill to continue the effort, her friends and neighbors took over.

One of those organizers, Paula Millar of Iron River, said the group is relatively informal.

"It's just me and a couple of my friends that lead it, and we just gather volunteers wherever we can," she said. "This year we have oodles of volun-

## If You Go

- WHAT: Fishin' Chicks ice-fishing tourney
- WHERE: Twin Bear Lake near Iron River, 10370 Highway H. Check in at the Iron River Community Center, 8275 E. Mill St.
- WHEN: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Jan. 15
- OTHER INFO: Registration fee of \$40 covers entry into the fishing contest, entertainment, lunch, shuttle service to and from the fishing area and five raffle tickets.

teers, which is simply amazing."

The process seems to work. In each of the two years that volunteers have run the tourney, it has raised \$10,000.

"We are hoping that this year we will be able to raise \$15,000," Millar said.

The guiding spirit of Laurie Soderlund still influences the organization and event.

"So many people have been impacted, one way or another, by breast cancer. Even the fear of it, that it such real thing, particularly for women. It makes people want

to continue the work Jeff and Laurie started," Millar said. "We have people who will just go out and fish on the lake, who pay to register not to fish, but because they love Laurie and Jeff."

Millar said the event draws the community together with more than 30 volunteers and 100 different businesses contributing.

"It really rallies the community together, and that says something about our community — and I mean Iron River, Mason, Ashland and Superior. We really draw in people from a far-ranging area."

Two years ago, the event drew in about 125 participants, falling a bit last year to

about 100. This year Millar said a total of 77 people pre-registered, but many contestants typically register on the day of the event.

Julie Bender of Iron River will be one of the anglers wetting a line this year. Bender is an enthusiastic summer fisher, but not so much of a fan of ice fishing.

"I have gone ice fishing a couple of times, not as much as summer fishing, but this event is raising money for compassionate care of people who are going through breast cancer treatment," she said. "It's for a good cause, that is for sure."

And a day out fishing is its own reward, she continued.

"It's a wonderful day to be out on the lake. Even though it's cold, it's wonderful to be out with a bunch of ladies who are willing to fight the cold and raise money for the cause," she said.

Bender said she

caught a small northern pike last year, but never anything that qualified for a prize in the six events in which she has taken part.

"But that's OK. This year my daughter and her friend are coming from Chippewa Falls, and they can compete," she said, admitting it was a long drive to come to freeze out on a northern lake. "But we are all strong Wisconsin women, so it will be all right, I guess," she said.

Tuesday marked the second anniversary of Laurie Soderlund's death, and Jeff said the continuing tournament is a tribute to her spirit.

"I hope the town can keep doing it year after year, because the message is strong and sincere," he said. "The old saying is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and there is a lot of truth in that as far as breast cancer is concerned."

## » TAX

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Ortman agreed that the city needs more revenue, but said he would prefer taking money from the general fund and borrowing to complete road projects.

But Moore said that would just create more debt for future generations to pay off.

Before a vote was taken, Puffall said "that I find it ludicrous to have somebody on this committee in favor of a wheel tax that probably doesn't have a vehicle."

"It's kind of like somebody that doesn't drink voting for prohibition," he said.

The Ashland vote comes as more and more municipalities are relying on wheel taxes to generate revenue for transported-related projects because state laws that limit property tax increases don't apply to vehicle registration fees. In 2011, four Wisconsin communities were using the fee to generate a combined \$7.5 million in revenue. By 2011, that number had jumped to 44 communities, generating \$62.8 million in combined revenue, according to information included in the council's agenda.



Ortman

## » WILDFIRE

FROM PAGE A1

Wildfire was badly hurt. But as he tended to his dog, Redington's next thought was of Keefer, who was a couple of minutes behind him on the trail with her own team.

"We were almost back to the kennel, about three miles from the kennel," she said. "The first thing I experienced was a snowmobile going very fast, right down the middle of the trail. It just veered off at the last second to avoid my dogs. A minute later I caught up to Ryan, who had parked his team with snow hooks and he shouted at me, 'Did that guy hit you?' And then he told me his team had been hit and that Wildfire was in bad shape. I couldn't believe it."

The two comforted Wildfire and called a friend for help. Then they phoned police.

"While we were on the phone with police we saw another dog holding his leg funny. He has lacerations on his leg as well, Willie, a star lead dog. And the others were kind of sore and more shaken. But Wildfire, he has three broken bones in his left rear leg, and they're all right around his knee."

## The aftermath

Bayfield County Sheriff's deputies took a report, but there wasn't much Redington or Keefer could tell them.

"He went by at such a high rate of speed, and I was doing my best to get myself out of the way," Redington said. "It happened so quick - I just was watching Wildfire go up in the air. I don't remember what the machine looked like or anything. I would bet he was going 60 mph."

Keefer thinks the machine might have been orange and black, but she's not certain. All she saw was a single rider aboard.

"If I had known what happened to Ryan I would have paid more attention," she said. "I only looked at him for a second and then my attention was back on my dogs."

But one thing is certain: There was another



Wildfire rests Wednesday morning after his surgery, as a kennelmate checks on him.



Sarah Keefer and Ryan Redington at the start of the 2021 Iditarod Sled Dog Race in Alaska. (Contributed photo by Barb Redington)

snowmobiler right behind the culprit. And that gives them hope — even if police are pessimistic.

"Given the lack of description, there is no way to find this machine or the operator," the Bayfield County report says.

## Pitching in

Almost immediately after the incident, word spread through the mushing community like, well, wildfire.

Word quickly reached fellow racer Quince Mountain, who lives in Oconto County near Green Bay and has competed against Redington.

"This guy left my friend on the trail with broken, bleeding dogs," Mountain said. "He didn't know if Ryan could make it out of the ditch and back to a road. He didn't even offer to help or call for help. He was most concerned with getting out of there.

It's hard to see how it

could have been an accident. Could have been a drunk person. Could have just been an idiot."

Whichever he was, Mountain was determined to bring him to justice. He started a reward fund that was up to \$1,000 in just a couple of days, money that will go to anyone who can identify the snowmobilers.

"That's come not only through the mushing community, but through the fans of dog sledding. It's a very tight-knit community. Fans call themselves the UglyDogs, and they're very organized and motivated."

Mountain is so determined, he said, in part because of who is involved. Redington's grandfather started the Iditarod just as snowmobiles were being introduced, in an attempt to preserve the bloodlines of dogs that were to the frozen north what the horse was to the Ameri-



Ryan Redington was out mushing again Tuesday, back on the Tri-County Corridor and encountering snowmobilers who slowed and passed him cautiously, including this one who gave him a thumbs-up. Redington said the photo shows how much room there is on the trail for vehicles to pass safely. (Contributed photo by Ryan Redington.)

can West.

But Mountain also feels for Redington and his team.

"These are our dogs," he said. "We have relationships with them. They're family. Sometimes people will say, 'How do you know the names of all your dogs?' That's like asking a teacher how they know all the names of kids in class. They all have different personalities. The old ones teach the young ones. And on a race, your lives depend on each other."

## Recovering

As Mountain was organizing a reward fund, Keefer began a GoFundMe site in hopes of raising the \$9,000 to \$12,000 that reconstructive surgery on Wildfire's leg was expected to cost — if a Minneapolis orthopedic surgeon could save the leg at all.

Again, word spread fast.

"I was pretty confident that if we asked for help covering veterinary expenses, we would get it," she said. "I estimated it would take about a half hour. I was wrong. It took 40 minutes."

But still the fund kept growing. On Tuesday, when Wildfire was scheduled for his operation, it was gaining \$1,000 every hour or two and by Wednesday, it was approaching \$40,000 in pledges.

Meanwhile, Wildfire was in surgery for a total of about eight hours Tuesday, Keefer said.

"We took a short walk this morning, but he's still pretty out of it," she said Wednesday. "He can't put any weight on it, so it was a three-legged walk. It took them longer than they expected for the break in his femur, but they said otherwise it was a near-perfect surgery. We just have to keep him off it now and watch out for infection."

## 'Keeping us going'

Redington, Keefer and Mountain are determined not to let the incident create a rift between mushers and snowmobilers.

Redington was back on the trail Tuesday when he spoke with a reporter on his cellphone, training for the Jan. 30 John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon in northern Minnesota, and he had had no problems.

"We met snow-machiners today and I took a photo of one giving us a thumbs up," he said. "There's plenty of room for all of us on this trail. It's been nothing but positive every year that we've been here."

In fact, snowmobilers more often than not want to stop and chat with mushers when they encounter one another.

Why one would intentionally run down a dog team mystifies Redington and Keefer.

"Sometimes I count how snow machines many we pass and there were dozens that day," Keefer said. "It was a beautiful day and it had been cold so by Saturday people were eager to get out. Snowmobilers often want to stop and have their pictures taken because it's a neat experience for them to see mushers."

For now, Redington is grateful for the support he's received from as far away as Germany, and hopeful that the reward prompts someone to come forward.

"I sure hope so," he said. "I'd like this never to happen to anyone again. No one should experience it. But the calls and messages and prayers, it's keeping us going. Wildfire will have to go through rehab and everything, and I don't know if he or Willie will be mushing again. They want to minimize exercise for 12 weeks, which is going to be tough for a dog like Wildfire that always wants to go. But we'll do it together and we'll get through it."

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