



GRANT COUNTY Herald Independent

WISCONSIN'S OLDEST WEEKLY NEWS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2021



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COMMENTARY

Lancaster, the clock has started

The community needs to come together to find solutions to the childcare problem

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

When the electors of the Lancaster Community School District authorized the ability to purchase the Scenic Rivers Cooperative headquarters last week, they started the clock for two items that need to be acted on, one for the community, one for the school district.

For the school district, they must come up with what are the needs for space and programs at Winskill for at least the next 20 years, and whether or not the former middle school building can fit into that plan.

For the community, it is a much bigger issue - how to tackle childcare in this community, which is already a problem, and would be a crisis if Maple Street Kids goes away.

Let's look at the second issue first, because almost all of us have a stake in this. Childcare affects the future of this community - individuals will look to live elsewhere if they cannot find a place for their young children. Businesses will not be able to attract workers, something we already see happening.

Simply, this community cannot grow if we cannot solve this.

And when I say childcare, I am not just talking about daycare for children who are too young to go to school. I am also talking about children who are attending school, and are too young to care for themselves between after school and when their parents get home. I am talking about children who do not have school during times like summer.

This is a problem for rural Wisconsin. Unlike more urban areas, where large employers can offer childcare for their employees, we do not have many employers who can. SW Tech and UW-Platteville are really the only ones - Southwest Health Center in Platteville wants to have childcare, has the space, but cannot find anyone to operate it.

There is no one entity that has the means or incentive to tackle this alone. For decades, the Lancaster Community School District has subsidized Maple Street with low rent fees, and perks like transportation offered, but unfortunately, the way school funding is there is no way for them to take this on directly, and while many of the students in Maple Street are, in fact students, who take advantage of the after-school portion of the daycare, that is not something that could be utilized in the budget formula.

We have had other entities consider offering childcare. Grant Regional Health Center looked at it when they were planning their phases of expansion, but again, it is an expensive proposition, and just couldn't fit in the most recent phase.

We have many companies who would welcome having childcare offered, but are too small to offer it themselves.

So, we need to see if we can figure this out and come up with reasonable ideas that can be turned into solutions.

This needs more than a column by me, so I reserved the Community Room of Schreiner Memorial Library for Wednesday, Jan. 5, for a forum, starting at 6:30 p.m.

I welcome anyone interested in this topic to attend to try to find a resolution.

The clock is ticking on this. Unless there is a new boiler in the works, Lancaster Community Schools will no longer have any offices in the former middle school building by the summer of 2023. That will mean the potential of Maple Street Kids losing their space any time after that (the district has said they will keep the building up for an undetermined amount of time, but really, this is the deadline).

This is not specifically about Maple Street Kids. They do, however, handle about 60 children, and there is no viable place for them to go in this community that can be certified

Childcare | SEE 10A

Electors authorize Scenic Rivers purchase

With 61-14 vote, school board can decide to buy campus

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

With about half the number of people in attendance compared to the annual meeting in October, fewer than 80 people authorized the Lancaster Community School District to purchase the current Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative headquarters from the firm, which is building a new headquarters on the north side of the city.

With a vote of 61-14, done via ballot, the electors assembled authorized the school district to buy the 7.2 acre complex, negotiated currently at \$1.175 million.

The school district, if it moves forward with the purchase, likely to

happen on Dec. 8 at the regular school board meeting, would buy the complex within the operating budget of the 2022-2023 school year, only having to short-term borrow to cover payments until aid and property tax revenue came in.

During the lengthy discussion on the issue, electors asked questions, discussed the merits of buying the energy cooperative complex, as well as ancillary ideas, like moving the fifth grade to the middle school to help alleviate the demand on the Winskill gymnasium, while also allowing students access to other programs at the middle school level.

Andrew Taylor, who said he was initially against the purchase, changed

his mind as he looked at the details more.

"When is the best time to buy the neighbor's farm, when it's for sale," Taylor said.

Ivars Kalnins said that people may have expected him to speak ill of the proposal, but he was in favor of it.

Concern about Maple Street Kids

One issue that had been brought up by several of the electors in the crowd was what would happen to Maple Street Kids Daycare, which leases portions of the former middle school.

Started in 1993 by then-staff of the school district, the program currently handles an average of 60 children. The daycare leases the space from the

district.

District Administrator Rob Wagner noted that if the district had to vacate the former middle school due to an issue like the boilers failing, he has a place for each school office to go into another building. However, the district has no space that Maple Street Kids could go, nor would it be possible to create a space for the daycare in the Scenic Rivers office if the district does purchase it.

He did note that they felt confident that the district could keep the former middle school operating for the foreseeable future.

Jim Muench, representative of the

School | SEE PAGE 7A



Fun, frosty night

Lancaster celebrated the light-off of the holiday season with the Frosty Night of Cheer Friday, which included the lighting of the lights around the courthouse lawn, a visit with Santa, and special hours for different shops.

Few people, fewer homes constraining economic development

2021 saw a real bounce back from pandemic

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

Going into 2021, Grant County Economic Development Director Ron Brisbois wasn't sure what was going to happen - would the economy bounce back, or continue to linger with a continuing pandemic.

The former is what happened, and with unemployment now hovering at two percent, Brisbois has found himself helping to work on other items to increase growth in the county.

"It went beyond what I expected," Brisbois said in his office last week, marking his 22nd year in the post. During those two plus decades, he never recalls being at two percent unemployment, something so low he is not sure it can drop any further.

Why so low? Well, production

returning to pre-COVID levels is a part of it. Another is one thing Brisbois noticed - people that were of retirement age that had remained in the workforce decided that instead decided to finally retire.

"I do see people who were retirement age, that were staying in the workforce, because opportunities were good for them," Brisbois noted. They had flexibility in things like hours or pay.

"After COVID, what I am hearing is many of these people started to think 'nah, I am just going to enjoy my retirement, I am going to go see my children and grandchildren.'"

For a tight workforce, that made things all the more tighter.

For years, Brisbois has been helping business with workforce preparedness,

helping them find programs to assist in training and educating those for certain jobs. Brisbois noted that SW Tech and UW-Platteville have programs that have assisted employers over the years.

"We have the funding in place to help those companies to train workers. It's just about finding those bodies."

Part of Brisbois job has now begun to focus more and more on items like housing. Brisbois assisted in a WEDC workforce development grant and he noted that existing businesses are attempting to hire and bring people in, but there is no place for those workers to live.

There is a bit of a chicken-and-egg thing for housing, however. For 2022, Brisbois sees an increase in housing, but there will be a bottleneck because there are only so many workers available to

build houses in the area.

"You have to find people to build the houses," Brisbois continued.

Brisbois said he still is working on attracting new businesses to the area, wanting to diversify the portfolio of businesses that are in the county. He noted that while unemployment is low, many residents are underemployed, either not working full-time, or not working in a sector they have skills for.

"They are here because they want to live here, but they have the skillsets to do other types of jobs," he stated.

It will also help in retaining individuals who grew up here, or went to school here, who may want to live here but are being recruited by outside companies.

Development | SEE 5A

BACK HOME BY CHRIS HARDIE

A sweet end to a successful hunt

The trees were silhouetted by the light of the waning but still large Beaver Moon as I slowly made my way down the hill toward my hunting spot.

It was shortly after 6 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 20, the opening day of the Wisconsin gun deer hunting season. The temperature was in the mid-20 degrees and the woods were still.

My 46th whitetail hunt began where it has been the past 16 years, in a ground blind on our family farm. I settled my back against a tree, poured myself a cup of coffee from a thermos that once belonged to my grandfather and settled in.

Morning comes slowly in my hunting valley as nature awakens. It's one of my favorite times of opening day as I soak in the surroundings and enjoy the stillness.

About 6:45 a.m., I heard two short hoots from a barred owl that landed in a nearby tree. I took a photo before the avian predator flew over the hill into the next valley, where it launched into several choruses of its easily recognizable call "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all," which carried across the quiet morning.

The squirrels started to stir about 7:30 a.m., including one that chattered for several minutes in a tree above me before scurrying down the trunk. The birds — including red-headed woodpeckers, chickadees and blue jays — searched for food.

Part of the challenge of hunting whitetail deer is being quiet and patient — two virtues I had little of as a youngster. There is no perfect place to hunt, but if you understand the lay of the land and observe deer behavior and patterns, you can put yourself into a spot favorable for seeing deer. After all, one has to see deer to have a chance at success.

At 8:30 a.m., I saw my first deer of the day. On the hillside to my left, about 150 yards away, four does ran through. I watched them go, knowing that sometimes they are followed by a buck. Sure enough, at 8:45 a.m., a small fork-horned buck walked the same trail. He was in no hurry, stopping several times before disappearing over the crest of the ridge.

It's always much easier to stay put when you see deer, and I always hunt my stand for the entire opening day. Besides, I had my little wood fire to keep me cozy and warm.

My patience paid off at about 10

a.m. when I spotted a large-racked buck following the same path as the deer before him. I shouldered my rifle and waited for him to clear some trees. It wasn't the perfect shot — there seldom are when you hunt in the woods — but I lined up the crosshairs and fired.

The buck flinched, ran a few feet and briefly stopped. I fired again. The buck disappeared from my view up the hill but I heard a loud crash.

Carefully lining up some trees where I last saw the buck, I walked up the hill to the spot. The loud crash that I hoped was the sound of the buck collapsing was confirmed when I found him under a tree.

It was a 9-point buck with a slightly atypical rack and an 18-inch antler spread. He had a big body and was probably 3 1/2 years old. It was one of the largest bucks I've shot.

I was luckier than some. Overall, the opening weekend registration numbers were down 14% this year, according to the Department of Natural Resources. The central farmland region where I hunt had a drop of 16%.

I sent a text to my son Ross and field dressed the buck. I dragged him for a few yards up the hill when Ross appeared. Together we each grabbed a side of the rack and pulled the buck about 100 yards to the edge of a field next to a wild apple tree.

Last year was the first time I hunted after my father died, but I was sick with COVID-19 and struggled to enjoy the hunt. Dad never missed hunting and we spent many hours together in the woods, sharing stories and enjoying the special bond between father and son.

Ross and I went back to my stand, toasted some sandwiches over the fire and told a few stories. I was thrilled with getting a nice buck, but time spent with my son was by far the best part of the day.

Later that afternoon, we lifted the buck into the back of the pickup, and Ross was able to reach a couple of apples still on the tree. They were a little frozen, but it was a sweet taste to end an even sweeter day.

Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.

Cybersecurity isn't just a techie issue, but a training and business challenge

MADISON — Here's a holiday office gift no business should want. Sophisticated cyber-thieves have taken to delivering innocent-looking packages, usually without any department or person named, in anticipation they will sit unnoticed and unclaimed on a mailroom shelf for a while. Inside the package: Devices that can remotely steal or compromise a company's digital data.

Merry Christmas! Happy Hannukah! You've been hacked.

While a non-conventional example, the unmarked package trick — called "warshipping" by some — illustrates the lengths to which some cybercriminals will go to gain access to corporate data, with all the trade secrets, financial accounts, passwords, codes and other sensitive information inside.

The rising challenge of cybersecurity for businesses of all types and sizes was examined during a recent meeting of the Tech Council Innovation Network in Madison, where the head of a leading business organization and two seasoned technology consultants offered tips and ideas for how companies can aggressively defend themselves.

Hint: It's not all about the technology, but also better training, breaking bad digital habits and improving corporate attitudes.

"Hope is not a (cybersecurity) strategy," said Buckley Brinkman, executive director of the Wisconsin Center for Manufacturing & Productivity. The WCMP, which is part of a national network of similar organizations, recently surveyed about 400 C-level executives statewide on a mix of issues and



BY TOM STILL

learned some are overconfident when it comes to cybersecurity.

Even though one in six Wisconsin manufacturers reported a data breach of some sort, 85% of those who have not been hacked said they are confident — even hopeful — their data is secure.

In a world where cyberattacks are predicted to cause \$6 trillion in economic damage in the coming year, companies should take security seriously at several levels, two other experts noted.

Jim Blair of Aberdeen Consulting and Todd Streicher of CyberNINES, both based in Madison, said a combination of steps can help better protect businesses and organizations of all sizes. They agreed companies are far better off getting ahead of trouble than waiting for a breach to happen, especially when such attacks aren't often noticed right away. Some advice:

Use multi-factor authentication across data platforms. Often called MFA, such systems require users to provide two or more verification factors to gain access to resources such as applications, online accounts or a virtual private network, or VPN.

Back-up data and systems on a regular basis. Some company leaders may think their digital assets are securely copied, but that can depend on systems and platforms.

Change weak or easily guessed passwords.

Budget for the technical resources that can wind up saving money later.

Perhaps the biggest defense recommendation is reducing the odds of human error. Training programs can help employees better identify common threats, such as "phishing" emails.

Phishing represents about 90% of all organizational attacks. Such attacks take place when an attacker pretends to be a trusted contact, thus enticing the user to quickly click a link or attachment that downloads a malicious file. That usually provides access to sensitive information, account details and more.

Like the "warshipping" packages, phishing attacks are becoming more clever. Attackers can pretend to be the boss asking an employee to transfer money from one account to another, for example, with the destination account being bad news for everyone involved except the hacker.

Often gamified and entertaining, cybersecurity training platforms can help employees better identify phishing and malware attacks before they happen.

With insurance companies becoming a lot pickier about cybersecurity insurance and government agencies setting more stringent cybersecurity standards for private contractors, the stakes are getting higher. Business leaders can't just "hope" their data systems are secure, but should take steps to make them so.

Still is president of the Wisconsin Technology Council. He can be reached at tstill@wisconsin technologycouncil.com.

Investigation records should be public

BY MATTHEW DEFOUR

Two years ago this month, a Madison East High School teacher chaperoning a Minneapolis field trip crept into students' rooms using copies of their room keys and planted hidden cameras in their bathrooms.

On Nov. 22, a few weeks after the teacher, David Kruchten, was sentenced to 12 years in prison, Madison School Board finally updated its field trip policies to prohibit chaperones from holding on to student room keys.

Why did it take the school board longer to make field trips safer for students than it took the courts to bring the creepy teacher to justice?

One reason is the school district's decision to withhold from the public investigative records related to the incident. A report prepared by an outside attorney at a cost to taxpayers of \$8,000 was completed in June 2020. But the district kept the report from parents, reporters and even the Madison School Board until it was accidentally released to the newspaper Isthmus in August 2021.

The report includes recommendations for new field trip policies and revelations — including the outrageous claim that no "reportable abuse" occurred — that might have spurred the school board to take action before this school year started. But the district didn't forward new field trip policy recommendations to the board until after the accidental release of the report.

"I'm surprised it's taken this long to get it, and it's unfortunate board members have to see it in the news," former Madison School Board president Gloria Reyes told the Wisconsin State Journal. "We need to be transparent about these issues even if we don't have all the answers."

Releasing the report also would have reassured families the district

was addressing their concerns transparently and expeditiously. Now the students are suing the district and Kruchten for the psychological damage his actions caused.

Even though the district accidentally released the full report, it continues to deny requests for the same record, as well as a \$30,000 third-party review of another hidden camera incident in an East High locker room. The locker room cameras were supposedly put in place to catch a custodian napping on the job, but they were in a location where special needs students changed clothes.

The district says it won't release either report because they are protected from public disclosure by attorney-client privilege.

A 1996 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision in Wisconsin Newspress, Inc. v. School Dist. of Sheboygan Falls affirmed that a letter between an outside attorney and a school board did not have to be disclosed under the state public records law. But the law does not prohibit releasing such records.

That's what should have happened here, in both cases, because of the undeniable public interest in this matter. Now, in addition to the lawsuit over the hotel cameras, the district faces a lawsuit from East High families over its failure to release the report into the locker room cameras.

Perhaps both lawsuits could have been avoided if the district had followed through on Superintendent Carlton Jenkins' pledge when he started in August 2020 "to be transparent."

Your Right to Know is a monthly column distributed by the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council (wisfoic.org), a group dedicated to open government. Council member Matt DeFour is state politics editor for the Wisconsin State Journal.



Childcare

FROM PAGE 1A

for a daycare. They don't have the money to build something.

Having 60 children with no place to go will exacerbate the issue of childcare in this community. It is why at least one person who runs another daycare raised their worry about losing Maple Street Kids during that meeting last week. In fact, many people raised their concern about losing the largest daycare provider in the community with this deal.

There is at this time no other place for those children to go.

That leads me to the other issue that needs to be decided, by the Lancaster Community School District - what are the space and program needs at Winskill? While they say its workable, I think things are going to be very tight when it comes to gym use for physical education if they cut down to the one gym. While moving the fifth grade may alleviate things, there should be a thorough review of what the district thinks it may need for the future there.

And if the district wants to assist, in any measure, with handling childcare for the community, District Administrator Rob Wagner noted that there are school staff that utilize Maple Street Kids.

It makes sense, since it was started by staff of the school. In a time when

it is so hard for school districts to find teachers, having that as something to offer could be used as an incentive.

The district needs to decide what to do with that former middle school building. For all those people saying it's a money pit, I will tell you that you are wrong - we should be thanking the citizens of this community in the 1920s for building a tank of a building.

It's a testament to their foresight that practically no money has been poured into that building for 96 years. The original boilers are on their last legs, with us as residents of the district getting more than our money's worth out of them.

All the damage shown in the mechanical section of the building is because a new roof should have been put on that section 20 years ago. Tuckpointing is to be expected for a 96-year old building.

That building doesn't need much work, really, and quite frankly, money needed to fix those issues has been poured into each of the other buildings of the district for the past 10 years.

The question that needs to be asked by the district is can the building fit the needs of the district for at least the next 20 years? It is a building from 1925 - can it be co-opted to handle the needs, and the regulations for the 21st Century?

That is a question that will require an engineer or architect. I know because a little time after Lancaster

built its current high school, my hometown of Shullsburg renovated their 1910-era high school, which I will admit was not as fortified as the former middle school building.

The architect came up with a plan that made major changes to the old school. Where their boiler sat in the basement is now the library. A 15-year old addition was removed, a staircase was taken out, and a new two-story wing was added.

An architect or engineering firm might see solutions that one may not think were possible. Like, say, ripping off the front steps of the middle school, and creating a new ground-level entrance. Or adding a wing onto the existing school that would include a new elevator and other spaces and mechanicals to aid in a new HVAC system for the whole complex.

In the end, for Shullsburg the renovation and expansion was less expensive than building a whole new middle/high school complex.

That is something the school district will need to consider, what fills those needs, and potentially can help with the demand for childcare in this community.

Getting back to childcare, please come to the forum on Jan. 5. I want to understand the scope of the problem, and what ideas you may have.

The clock is ticking, and we cannot put this off any further.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PLEASE SEND LETTERS TO:
GRANT COUNTY HERALD
INDEPENDENT
P.O. BOX 310
LANCASTER WI 53813
OR EMAIL:
NEWSEditor@TDS.NET
(PLEASE INCLUDE TELEPHONE NUMBER)

JOHN INGEBRITSEN PUBLISHER	JINGE@TDS.NET	PRODUCTION	EARL MCLEAN, SHAWN SISLEY, JIM MUENCH, MIKE MCCARTNEY, KRISTIN WINKLER, RENEE HEIMDAL, MARSHA SISLEY, JENNIFER ROESCH, DENNIS LYGT & JANE LEWIS
DAVID TIMMERMAN EDITOR	NEWSEditor@TDS.NET		
A.J. GATES SPORTS EDITOR	HISPORTS@TDS.NET		
KEVIN KELLY DIRECTOR OF SALES	KKADS@TDS.NET		
JODI WHITE ADVERTISING SALES REP.	JWHITE@SWNEWS4U.COM		
GLORIA LANDON BILLING CLERK	MNCBILLING@YAHOO.COM		
JESSICA BROWNELL AD DESIGN	HERALDADS@TDS.NET		
EMILY KOCH AD DESIGN LEGALS	LANNETS@TDS.NET		
AMY LAUFENBERG AD DESIGN	DESIGN@SWNEWS4U.COM		
SANDY TAYLOR CIRCULATION	MNCCIRCULATION@YAHOO.COM		

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