

Tragedy in Mineral Point
 Firefighters killed in crash on way to scene
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LHS grapplers can't overcome PdC
 Young Arrows squad gets tested against Blackhawks
 SEE SPORTS

Nature preserve in county expanded
 Family feels it is best to preserve land for generations
 SEE PAGE 5A

Focusing on childcare

Yearlong effort will look at issue and attempt to find solutions

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
 NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

The problem is so easily visible, yet the fix is far from clear. It is not just a family issue, but it is also an economic development issue. It is a health issue.

That issue, which I don't need to tell you because it is right in the headline for this story is about childcare, and it is something I plan on focusing this publication, and hopefully the community on for this year.

Last week, I held a forum at Schreiner Memorial Library to kick off this community discussion, attended by less than a dozen people (several more reached out, but because of potential weather issues, many wondered if it would be held).

While not a huge group, the discussion that took place was fruitful, as there was a cross-section of residents there, including representatives of a couple of different daycare providers, as well as parents dealing with the issue of finding a place for their children to go.

It was a good start, but there is a long way to go until a solution, or a group of solutions to the problem.

When you look at the numbers, it is easy to see this is a big issue. According to Census data, in 2019 there were 355 children ages 0-4 living in the Lancaster Community School District alone.

For a simple comparison, on the district report cards we reported on last week, the school district had 958 students enrolled.

Now some of the ages 0-4 are active in the school district, enrolled in early childhood or 4K programs, but that is a large number of children in that age group.

One couple in attendance for the meeting has a child who has not reached their first birthday. Both parents work, and when their original plan of a family member watching their

Childcare | SEE 8A



Grant Regional welcomes first baby of 2022

The wait was only seven days, as Grant Regional Health Center welcomed the first baby of the new year Jan. 7 Tyler Dominguez-Rodriguez was born to parents Lordes Rodriguez and Moises Dominguez, Fennimore, and joins siblings Bryan and Elver. Being the first baby of the new year, Tyler and his family get an assortment of items - turn to Page 10A to see the items and the businesses that donated them.



Schools adjust to new guidelines, surges in COVID

As we get closer to the end of Year 2 of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new variant of the virus is creating a new wrinkle for area schools due to its ability to spread much easier than previous ones.

"We are experiencing an unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin as the Omicron variant spreads here in our state and across the globe," stated Wisconsin Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ryan Westergaard and Wisconsin State Health Officer Paula Tran in a press release Monday, noting that the seven-day average of new confirmed cases has increased nearly 150 percent in the past two weeks, with children under 18 representing the highest number of new cases.

"We must all continue working together to protect our students and school staff from COVID-19 so we can keep our students healthy and engaged in learning," they continued to say.

They recommended that schools either start or continue testing of students and staff, utilizing the school-based testing program available to district. This program has been active since the start of the school year, and has provided either rapid antigen or PCR sets for participating school districts.

This also comes soon after there were recommendations by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on guidance for K-12 schools to align with the updated quarantine and isolation guidance. This shortened the recommended length of isolation from 10 days to five days for people with COVID-19 who do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, or symptoms have resolved or are improving after five days, followed by five days of wearing a well-fitting mask to minimize the risk of infecting others.

"I fully support this letter and the strategies it recommends, and I call on all district and school administrators to follow these recommendations," added State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly on the recommendations. "We cannot keep our children engaged in learning if we cannot keep our children and our school staff healthy. To that end, in addition to calling on all school administrators to implement these mitigation measures, I also ask all Wisconsinites for their help in keeping our children and school staff healthy and safe. We must work together to achieve the common goal of healthy kids, healthy educators, and safe schools."

The recommendations do not address the type of mask recommended to wear. Several experts have been asking people to switch to a least surgical masks, if not N95 style masks, which have better filtration than a simple cloth mask, which has been the go to for much of the pandemic.

So what are local districts doing? For the Lancaster Community School District, the Lancaster Community School Board will have met Wednesday to see about making revisions to the current school policies.

As of Wednesday morning, the district retains the 10-day isolation timeline for those who test positive. They have not made the change because the school board has not met since the recommendation for five days was made, and the board is the one who set the policy.

Currently, Lancaster remains mask optional for those who are not considered close contacts, as the level of spread has stayed below the thresholds to require masks for all.

Lancaster has not participated in the state testing program, primarily due to the fact that the county testing program is taking place in Lancaster.

Districts | SEE 2A



On Friday, Chief Deputy Jack Johnson and Deputy Jay Fitzgerald were recognized at the Grant County Sheriff's Office, as both are retiring from the department. Johnson has been with the department for 33.5 years.

Johnson reflects on 3.5 decades in law enforcement
 Chief Deputy since 2005 wrapped up career Friday

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
 NEWSEDITOR@TDS.NET

Nearly 34 years ago Jack Johnson started his first day at the Grant County Sheriff's Office.

Friday was Johnson's last day at work. Between his first day and his last day there has not been one part of the department he had not been a part of.

From the Richard-Iowa-Grant Drug Task Force to evidence storage, Johnson has touched almost every aspect of the department in his 34 years in the job. But reflecting back at that career, the people are what he will miss the most.

"I am going to miss the people," he said. "I am going to miss the people here. I am going to miss helping people in the community."

Johnson noted that during the current national debate on law enforcement, he doesn't see the support for officers wavering in the community.

"In Grant County, we have the support of the citizens," he said. "They want us here. They respect us. They like the job we do."

"Overall, it is a great place to work. If I was getting a new job, this is where I would want to work, not this

big city."

That feeling is not unearned. The department has taken steps over the years to improve officer training and policies that govern deputies. The office also seeks to be transparent during incidents.

"We don't hide stuff," he said. "If there is an issue, we deal with it."

Johnson talked about how the Sheriff's Office makes sure it does extensive background checks and psychological evaluations when hiring deputies and other employees. "We take pride in how we hire people, the steps

we take to hire people," he said.

Once they are hired, they are continually going through training, including firearms training.

"When I started, we shot at bowling pins," said Johnson. "Now, we do scenarios. You do shooting in the dark. You do shooting out of a car."

Johnson said he and retiring Deputy Jay Fitzgerald, who also had his last day Friday, were sent to become Defense And Arrest Tactics instructors for the department, training deputies on what

Johnson | SEE 4A

A LOOK BACK

60 YEARS AGO
JANUARY 11, 1961

GRANT COUNTY INDEPENDENT

A conference to kick off a new program of industrial promotion will be held in Lancaster on Wednesday, Feb. 28, it was announced this week by David Carley, director of the Wisconsin department of resources development, and Larry Cohick, coordinator of resources development in Grant county. Representatives from every city and village, as well as public-spirited citizens, are expected to attend the Lancaster meeting. Representing the state at the conference will be experts from the department of taxation, economics, plant location engineers, and promotion men from the department of resources development. Bankers, industrialists, utility and railroad men will be asked to represent business.

50 YEARS AGO
JANUARY 13, 1971

GRANT COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Grant county's albino deer, shot illegally in 1970, has come to stay at Potosi, the area in which the animal was first reported. The head of the rare animal has been preserved through taxidermy and is now in display at the Potosi State Bank through the courtesy of the Southwestern Wisconsin Sportsman Club and bank officials. In the fall of 1970, there were several reports of the sighting of an albino white-tailed deer, with the first coming from the Potosi area. As the animal moved eastward, there were more sightings reported, with the last coming from the Dickeyville area. Then in November of 1970, during the regular gun season on deer, the albino deer was found killed by gunshot near Dickeyville.

40 YEARS AGO
JANUARY 13, 1981

GRANT COUNTY HERALD INDEPENDENT

Just a week after a 10-inch snow that closed schools, roads and many business places, the tri-state area was again battered and bruised by the tempests of winter. It all started Thursday, Jan. 7, when the mercury began a downward plunge that seemed as though it would never stop. That morning the University of Wisconsin Experimental Farm at Lancaster reported a low temperature of minus 18. The next morning was a little better at minus 16, but nature really lowered the boom Saturday. Saturday morning the low reading was again 18 below zero and as if that wasn't enough, the winds began to blow, creating near blizzard conditions as the snow was whipped through the air, reducing visibility to zero in some places. The winds and cold became even more severe Sunday, Jan. 10, when the Experimental Farm reported the mercury had fallen to minus 28. Some residents reported minus 32 on their thermometers.

30 YEARS AGO
JANUARY 16, 1992

GRANT COUNTY HERALD INDEPENDENT

The director of the Galena/Jo Davies Convention and Visitors Bureau, Kathleen Webster, said representatives from the Illinois Film Office, actor Harold Ramis and the film's art director were considering Galena as the primary film site for a new film entitled, "Groundhog's Day." Bill Murray and Ramis would star in and direct the film. Filming would take place over a three-week period in late February or early March. Also looked at were sites in Mount Carroll, Ill., Platteville and Mineral Point.

20 YEARS AGO
JANUARY 17, 2002

GRANT COUNTY HERALD INDEPENDENT

Nearly two years after losing in his bid to become Grant County Sheriff, jail administrator Sgt. Bob Nelson has stepped down from his position with the department. The department held a retirement party for him Friday and while he's been on vacation since December, his official last day was Monday. It's been a career that's spanned more than 30 years and had him working with five different sheriffs. He said his age, he's 55, and his years of service, 33, and maxed out on state retirement, were reasons for his retiring.

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- All letters must be signed by one person - letters not signed will not be published
- Letters must be a reasonable length. There is no specific word limit, but if a letter is seen as "too long," the writer will be contacted to reduce it
- Letters can be emailed, but must have a telephone number for confirmation
- No letters will be printed that disparage or openly slander others in the community
- Letters cannot be a "thank you," selling items or solicitation

for any service

- Only one letter per person, per month will be printed, unless the following letters are answering a response letter published in the paper

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(PLEASE INCLUDE TELEPHONE NUMBER)

BACK HOME BY CHRIS HARDIE

The day Wisconsin froze to 60 below zero

Old memories become blurry with the passage of time, but a particularly cold Sunday 45 years ago that stands out for me was memorable across western and northern Wisconsin.

I've written before about a bitterly-cold Sunday morning when our family miraculously made it to church. It may have been with some divine intervention, because getting chores done on the farm takes at least twice as long when the weather is so cold.

At the end of the service during announcements, the pastor remarked to the small group of shivering pilgrims about it being something like 35 degrees below zero that morning. My grandmother Cecil Hardie promptly stood up — all of her barely 5 feet — and proudly offered in her Norwegian lilt: "It was 44 below in Franklin this morning."

If any other worshipers had a colder temperature to report, they held their tongue. Grandma had spoken. Grandma watched the thermometer outside her kitchen window with great vigilance. She took pride in being the amateur meteorologist of the town.

Well, it turns out there were some colder spots than Franklin that day. It was on Jan. 9, 1977, that Barron County undersheriff Jerry Johnson could scarcely believe his eyes. According to an article in the Jan. 12, 1977, Rice Lake Chronotype, the thermometer outside the window had dipped to minus 60 degrees.

Johnson reported the reading to the dispatcher and spent the rest of the day — which happened to be Super Bowl Sunday (and hell had not frozen over, evidenced by the Oakland Raiders crushing the Minnesota Vikings, 32-14) — answering phone calls from reporters around the

country.

Warren Leary, the Rice Lake Chronotype publisher at the time, wrote:

"But minus 60? You've got to be kidding! Johnson was getting a little vexed with the inquiries. He wanted the callers to buzz off so he could watch the Super Bowl. And he wanted it to warm up, too. So did all the rest of us."

Here in Rice Lake, and in Cameron, in Canton, in Brill, in Barron, in Haugen and heaven knows where else, the tiny ice crystals spread out in a frigid frost haze over the snowy landscape.

Cars refused to start. Cats and dogs refused to poke their noses out of doors. Husbands refused to go ice fishing or snowmobiling. Some folks refused to even get out of bed.

Church services were sparsely attended. You could shoot a cannon up Rice Lake's Main Street and not hit a soul. Hardly anybody came by the drug store for the Sunday paper. Water declined to flow from some faucets. Here and there a power line snapped.

It was cold, cold, cold and the furnace kept running, guzzling that high-priced stuff."

Those furnaces that kept working, anyway. Others with outdoor fuel oil tanks stopped when the fuel gelled because of the cold.

Johnson went on to serve as the Barron County sheriff from 1989 to 1999. He died in 2000. But his weather observation that day gave him some nationwide press, as even the National Enquirer wrote about the cold.

"At first, I thought my damn thermometer was broken," Johnson told the Enquirer. "I've lived in the

north country all my life, and I've never even heard of anything this cold before."

Did it really get that cold? Like Grandma's thermometer, Johnson's thermometer did not meet National Weather Service guidelines. Officially, the coldest temperature ever recorded in Wisconsin was minus 55 in the Sawyer County village of Courderay on Feb. 4, 1996.

In a 2017 follow-up story 40 years after the cold, The Chronotype said the official temperature in Rice Lake that day matched Franklin at minus 44. That's what it was when the thermometer at the Rice Lake airport burst. Mercury freezes at minus 38.

Don Carney, a local historian, told The Chronotype that a high-pressure system was hanging over Barron County that morning. He has mapped the temperatures and said he had farmer friends in the area who also registered minus 60.

Had it been made official, the minus 60 would be tied for the sixth-lowest temperature ever recorded in the continental U.S. The Courderay mark of minus 55 is the 11th coldest on record. The lowest ever is minus 80 recorded Jan. 23, 1971, at Prospect Creek, Alaska, near the Arctic Circle.

Yes, it was cold in Franklin 45 years ago.

But not as cold as Cameron.

Even Grandma would have had to concede that.

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.



Childcare

FROM PAGE 1A

child fell through, they were left scrambling for an alternative.

They called every daycare provider they could over the course of two weeks. Many of them said they simply had no spots, and long waiting lists for spots. One said they may have an opening in six months, but even that was not guaranteed.

Fortunately, they were able to find a location in Boscobel, where the husband works. That means the child must ride 30 minutes every day to the daycare, then another 30 minutes back. It also means that for the mother, she is 30 minutes away from her child, and if something happens, the father must handle it (they noted his employer is very understanding, and allows him to leave work when dealing with an emergency).

It is also not just an issue for parents with very young children, as there is a lack of places for young school-age children to go. Again, according to Census numbers, the number of children ages 5-12 (a range you may not want to be left home alone after school) was 564 living within the school district.

With a greater percentage of residents working outside of the city, how to handle where your children can go after school for the time before you return home from work is equally trying.

Another parent who was there with two school-age children said they were fortunate to have family in Lancaster their children could go to after school.

But many are not so lucky. And again, there are so many school age children the area daycares can handle - if certified and licensed, they have a maximum limit, and after-school students count against that cap just as much as those younger ones staying all day.

Now the reason I wanted to spend the year really focused on this is the upcoming dilemma with Maple Street Kids, the largest childcare provider. Maple Street is looking at its current location within the former middle school building attached to Winskill going away sometime possibly in 2023, when the district moves all of its operations out of that structure.

Those from Maple Street said they plan on continuing, and have been active looking at locations they can move to.

One of the hurdles they face,

however, is the cost increases moving to a different location. The low rent the district charges, probably a legacy from the daycare being created by then-school staff, is impossible to beat, and any move is likely going to mean an increase in costs for those families going there.

Cost, for both daycare providers, an for families is a big issue, not just in Lancaster but in rural Wisconsin, where the daycare problem is worse than in urban or suburban areas.

Why is it a bigger problem in rural Wisconsin than in those other areas. Well, for one, lower wages mean that families have less money they can allocate to daycare.

One of the parents who attended stated that while they have contemplated and wish to have another child, they simply cannot afford to have another one in daycare at what they have to pay.

The issue of wages also cuts into staffing for daycare providers as well. Grant County currently has a two percent unemployment rate, which has pushed area employers to increase wages to get workers. That has made the ability to fill openings at providers tough, as many can make more at other jobs than they can in daycare.

That lack of ability to find

workers, along with limited options for spaces for places like Maple Street means even if they find a new location (and those representing them state they will find another location for if/when they have to move) they may run into the issues of either having a smaller space, and/or fewer staff, which means they will have fewer spots for children to apply for.

Another reason childcare is a bigger issue in rural Wisconsin is because there are fewer entities big enough to take on the problem. Larger employers, larger school districts, other non-profits are able to handle the expenses of creating childcare programs.

As someone pointed out during the meeting, this is an economic development issue. Right now, we are living in an economy where the worker has more individual say than they may have ever had before. Workers, and businesses are looking at where they want to be, what type of lifestyle they wish to provide.

For many, this means looking at rural areas like southwest Wisconsin, where outdoor opportunities, the ability to build on less expensive land than the big cities, is enticing.

It also means that businesses and workers are looking at all aspects of

what an area offers - it is not just the level of broadband or the quality of schools, but also where their younger children may be able to go when they are working.

So where do we go next? Different ideas were thrown out there. Is there the ability to create a large, centralized childcare location, a place that can offer ideal space for children and workers, one that can also attract additional funding from area businesses who want a place their employees can go?

Is there a way to create a partnership with different educational institutions? Are there funding sources, either for the creation of childcare spaces, or for funding operations, ones that have not either been realized?

More people need to be involved as this conversation continues. I am planning another meeting to take place sometime next month, and in the meantime there is going to be work to see what other partners can get involved in this.

If you have any thoughts or suggestions or want to get involved in this, let me know by emailing newseditor@tds.net

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JANE LEWIS

Volume 179 - Issue 2
GRANT COUNTY
Herald Independent
WISCONSIN'S OLDEST WEEKLY NEWSPAPER
USPS 226-380

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY MORRIS NEWSPAPER CORPORATION OF WISCONSIN, 208 W. CHERRY STREET, LANCASTER, WI 53813. TELEPHONE (608) 723-2151. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT LANCASTER, WI. CONTENTS © MMVIII BY MORRIS NEWSPAPER CORPORATION OF WISCONSIN. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
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\$43 (2 YRS. \$79)
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