



Organizers continue to renovate the old Ashland Motel to make it suitable for homeless residents who could be able to move in by the end of the year. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

» LOCAL

FROM PAGE A1

And there's another big reason to shop in town, McPhetridge said: Of every dollar someone spends locally, 67 cents stays in the community. Shoppers who support local businesses help the local economy by providing jobs, paying taxes and supporting financial infrastructure.

Over in Bayfield, the first thing customers notice when they walk into Honest Dog Books on Second Street is something impossible to experience online: the smell of the store, followed by the sheer volume of books stocked on the shelves, co-owner Julie Buckles said. Each book in stock is selected based on what she and staff members think customers might want to read, and they help customers find what they're looking for.

Service like that can't be found at big-box stores or online, Buckles said.

"We read all of our books and have reviews about a lot of the books, Buckles said. "With Amazon, it's all about speed and the lowest price."

Customer service likewise is the name of the game for Hometown Expressions owners Tricia Bowers and Lindsey Zifko.

"When you walk in the door, we want you to feel welcome and want to know how your day is going," Bowers said.

Business has been tough for many owners since COVID-19 hit, but Bowers said local shoppers have had their back.

"We've gotten a lot of support from the community," she said. "A lot more people are realizing what local shopping does for the community."

Small businesses are the backbone of a city's economy, McPhetridge stressed. "The small retailers that

line historic Main Street and many that are located on Highway 2 are locally owned and operated. Locally owned small businesses are usually sponsors of youth sports, donate to the many benefits and charities in the community. Many are our neighbors and friends, and are committed to the success of the Ashland community," she said.

Like other storeowners, that is the No. 1 reason Bowers and Zifko opened Home Expressions — to be part of and support the community they love. The two have gone out of their way to support local charities, non-profit organizations and youth programs.

"If small business don't support them, they are going to hurt," Bowers said.

Bowers and Zifko support the area in others ways, too, by selling products made by local vendors. The shelves are stocked with one-of-a-kind items that can't be bought anywhere else, Bowers said.

"(Local vendors) do fabulous work. Things they sell are more on the higher end, but you can't find that quality of work at a Walmart or Target or any of the big box stores. Each and every piece is different and never the same because they make them all individually," she said.

Likewise, the Bayfield Artists Guild on Rittenhouse Avenue is stocked with art pieces and products made by 22 local artists from the area, ranging from paintings to glass work to shoes. Checking out one of the pieces, artist Dorine Damm said shopping at places like the Guild gives people a sense of what the area is all about.

Without such shops, there would be no downtown, Miller said.

"If we have just bunch of empty buildings, how nice is your town?" she asked.

» SHELTER

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COVID-19 has made the situation much worse, Douglas said, as more people have lost their jobs and apartments.

"You're talking just in the city," Olbekson said. "With a population of 7,000 people, that's quite high and it's growing."

Giving people like Douglas a place to stay for an extended period would give him a big leg up, Olbekson said. The facility is not intended to be permanent housing, and resi-

dents will be expected to move out within a month.

"The shelter is going to give them a place to shower, sleep and find work," Olbekson said. "We're so looking forward to that. Once it opens, I can finally refer people there."

Having a shelter is a start, but it doesn't solve the problem, said Casie Ledin, Ashland Homeless Help Assistant Director.

"I'm grateful for shelter. Also need a warming shelter as a place to stay a night as the temps get colder," she said.



Lindsey Zifko of Hometown Expressions in Ashland stocks the shelves Wednesday.



Tiny shoes made by local artists are for sale at the Bayfield Artists Guild.

» RACE

FROM PAGE A1

That includes the behind-the-scenes work of removing downed trees blocking trails, brushing the pathway and other prep work that should have taken place in October before the first snowfall.

"That should have been happening every week, making sure the trail was clear of debris," Fahrenkrog said.

Once the snow began, the meticulous process of trail grooming could begin.

"It's just like at the ski hill. You start pushing the snow, prepping it for when all the snow comes, and you have to keep doing that, and you do that with snowmobiles, and we don't own any of that. We don't have any of that

infrastructure in place," she said.

The event has relied on volunteer help, and the core group that organizes the volunteers suffered a blow with COVID. It was not able to rebound sufficiently to get the event on track for this winter, Fahrenkrog said.

"It doesn't mean we can't reestablish it, and this is a wake-up call for everybody that we need some help with this," she said. "I know that we have a lot of people who are very passionate about it, and with that passion we will bring it back, but this late in the game, that just couldn't happen this year," she said.

The cancellation will be a blow to the tourism economy of the Bay Area, Bayfield County Tourism Director Mary Motiff said.

"Any winter tourism event is helpful for our

businesses to get through the winter. It will definitely have a noticeable effect, especially for those businesses in downtown Bayfield that are open in the winter and are looking for that business," she said.

Motiff said the emphasis will now go to promoting winter events at Mount Ashwabay and at other regional locations.

"With COVID still lingering, outdoor activities are still going to be a big draw," she said.

Fahrenkrog said the chamber would also help to promote Winter Fest hosted by Bayfield's Rec-



Motiff

reation Fitness Resources, and asked mushers to consider participating in Iron River's Northern Pines Sled Dog Race to be held on Feb. 19.

Still, for those who love the Apostle Islands Sled Dog Race, the cancellation is a tough blow.

"It's sad because it is a training ground for all these young mushers, one of whom is heading to Alaska soon

Fosdick to defend his junior Ididarod title," said Bayfield businesswoman Cheryl Fosdick. "It's an important race — it's a teeth-cutting race for a lot of little kids"

Fosdick has volunteered to work with the



Fosdick

timing crew at the race for several years. She remains eager to resume her duties when the event makes its comeback, whenever that might be.

"I'm guessing there may be a new course that year, and I think there are going to be some changes," she said. "I know Mount Ashwabay is interested in getting involved. I think there may be some new players involved, and in the end it may turn out to be a more sustainable race."

For Janet Martins, the return of the race would mean the resumption of an event that attracted racers of all different skill levels.

"It attracts mushers from all over the Midwest. There are people like Jeff King who competed one year, and he is

an Ididarod champion. Then there are people like us who are just backyard racers who grew up with the race. It's like a family reunion of sorts," she said.

Both Talia and Morgan Martins went to the Ididarod in February. Morgan will return next year to defend his title, and his mother said it is all due to the start they got at the Apostle Islands Sled Dog Race.

"I think it was their ticket to doing better things. Without that race we would never gotten into dog mushing as much as we have," she said.

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Line up!

Ashland's holiday parade coming Saturday, **A3**

Coast to coast:

A Q&A with Castle Guard multi-sport athlete Olivia Soltero, **B1**



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> **Ellis "Bud" LeRoy Casper Jr. - Bayfield**

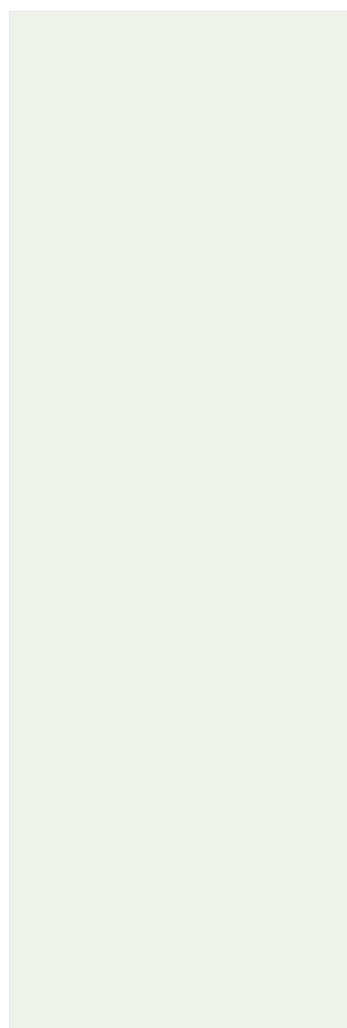
> **Terry Lee Miller - Ashland**

> **Ardis "Tiny" Elizabeth Cloud - Odanah**

> **Teresa E. Roy - Ashland**

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(Photo contributed by Bayfield Chamber and Visitor Bureau)

Mushing no more

Apostle Islands Sled Dog Race cancelled again

BY RICK OLIVO
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The Apostle Islands Sled Dog Race has for years been a joyful annual ritual for Janet Martins and her two children, Morgan, 15, and Talia, 21.

Morgan began a mushing career at the race — a career that since led him to win the junior version of the most prestigious sled dog race in the world, Alaska's Iditarod, on Feb. 28 with a time of 17 hours, 15 minutes and 20 seconds.

When the 2021 Apostle Islands race was cancelled because of COVID-19 restrictions, the Brule family was sorely disappointed, but understood the precaution. This year, however, their disappointment was multiplied when Bayfield Chamber and Visitor Bureau race officials announced that the 2022 event would also be cancelled due to "a sudden lack of trail and race marshaling leadership."

"Both of my kids love that race, and so do I," Janet Martins said. "They've all moved up in the ranks in the children's race, and now they were planning on running the 80-mile race. It is a real disappointment because it is so close to home and it's a charming race. The people we know who compete in the race are friends, and very support-



The Martins Family, Talia (from left), Tim, Janet and Morgan, have made the Apostle Islands Sled Dog Race an annual event for years. Experience Morgan gained at the race allowed him to win the prestigious Iditarod junior event in Alaska. (Contributed photo)

ive of each other. It's a very close knit community of mushers."

The race is actually a series of races, 80-, 60- and 40-mile events for teams of up to 10 dogs that run through the hills overlooking Bayfield. It also includes a family/recreation run and a youth race. All told, the races bring about 50 competitors, 1,000 spectators and more than 200 volunteers to town, all organized by the Bayfield Chamber and Visitor's Bureau.

The decision to cancel the 26th annual event was not made lightly, chamber Executive Director Carol Fahrenkrog said.

"It was very hard on us

to make that decision," she said. "We lost our infrastructure, our trail- and race-marshaling leadership. What people don't understand is, yes we are the chamber and this is our event, but we don't own the snowmobiles used in the event. We are not experts in trail maintenance and making sure it is safe. There is so much work that has to go into it before the mushers even get there."



Fahrenkrog

SEE RACE PAGE A5

Businesses renew shop-local drive

BY TOM STANKARD
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Jaci Pruitt and Karla Miller traveled about an hour from Montreal to go grocery shopping and have lunch in Ashland Wednesday, but ended up shopping for Christmas decorations at Home Expressions on a whim.

While browsing the shelves inside the store on Main Street, filled with green and red decorations, Miller picked out a pair of soft, warm gloves and showed them to her friend. "Feel these gloves," she said. "I think I just bought a new pair of gloves. Didn't mean too."

Moments like that don't happen when shopping online, Miller said. She prefers to shop in-person at local businesses during the

holiday season, rather than sending her money to a far-away company online.

"I like shopping at local businesses over box stores because you get to come in, see and feel everything," she said, smiling and looking around the store.

That's music to the ears of Mary McPhetridge, Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce director. She and other business leaders are pushing their buy-local message this year with renewed vigor as supply-chain delays plague big-box retailers and local businesses rebuild after the shock of COVID.



McPhetridge



Jaci Pruitt and Karla Miller of Montreal shop at Home Expressions in Ashland Wednesday morning. Both said they prefer to spend their money in local businesses, rather than sending it to online or big-box retailers. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

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Homeless shelter aims for Dec. opening

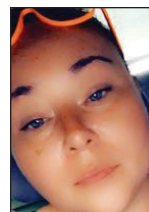
BY TOM STANKARD
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

John Douglas has not had a place to call his own for roughly seven years.

He's now living in a tent at a campground about 20 miles from Ashland because he can't camp within the city limits without getting run out of town, Douglas said.

While going out to check on him and bring him supplies, Ashland homeless advocate Jeanna Olbekson found his water jugs frozen, it's been so cold out. Being homeless shouldn't be a death sentence, Olbekson said, but as temperatures drop, it could be for people like Douglas.

That's why he, other homeless folks and advocates like Olbekson are so eager for Ashland's first homeless shelter to open at the former Ashland Motel along Highway 2.



Olbekson

Northwest Wisconsin Community Services acquired the building in October and it is working hard to get the facility open within the next month, CEO Millie Rounsville said.

"We've been getting work done based on availability," she said. "All the electricity has been updated in all the rooms. We have heat in all the rooms."

Internet and phone service needs to be set up, a security system needs to be installed and some rooms need to be adapted for handicap access, Rounsville said. But once it's all done, the building will offer more than 20 rooms for people to stay in for an extended period of time and a laundry room — a service that means a lot more than people think, Rounsville said.

Neither reservations nor a waiting list will be necessary to stay at the shelter, Rounsville said. Applicants need to phone ahead or just show up and pass a background check. Registered sex offenders, those with warrants for their arrest or with recent violent criminal charges will be turned away.

The shelter has been a subject of opposition in recent months, as a number of residents have voiced concerns about it hurting the city's image and security risks it might bring about.

Olbekson, who operates the volunteer homeless advocacy effort Ashland WI Homeless Help, said the city now has about 150 homeless people living in tents like Douglas, in cars or on friends' couches.



Rounsville

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Long shot:
A Q&A with Jumberjills best-ever golfer Mikayla Santjer, **B1**

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- > **Thomas M. Zorn** - San Francisco, CA
- > **Becky Lou Wiberg** - Ashland
- > **Mark K. Pycha** - Moore Haven, Florida

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SEDIMENT-REDUCTION EFFORTS PROGRESSING

Burke Center project takes on erosion along Fish Creek

BY **RICK OLIVO**
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The north branch of Fish Creek runs through a thickly wooded mixed forest of hardwoods and evergreens about 14 miles west of Ashland.

It is a cold, and usually clear Class I trout stream. But when torrential rains strike, as they have three times in the past seven years, the normally placid creek becomes a raging torrent and turns into the largest source of excess sediment and phosphorus feeding into Chequamegon Bay.

But if efforts being undertaken by Northland College's Mary Griggs Burke Center for Freshwater Innovation are successful, that destructive erosion may someday be controlled or even halted.

That would be quite an accomplishment. On Father's Day of 2018, the storms were so violent that a bridge culvert on Highway 2 less than a mile upstream failed, sending a tidal wave of water through the narrow valley, sluicing an estimated 45,000 tons of sediment into the bay and creating a plume of mud that could be seen from space.

"Behind us lies ground zero



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY BOB GROSS

TOP: A surveyor helps map out the fish creek channel in preparation for the restoration project that will direct water-flow away from the eroding bluffs. ABOVE: The storm-scoured bluffs at several spots on Fish Creek are the primary cause of silt runoff, which harms people and the bay's environment.

for sediment and phosphorus contributions into the bay," said Matt Hudson, associate director of the Burke Center.

Hudson said the failure of the bridge and the erosion caused by the Father's Day Flood were devastating for the Bay Area.

"The failure of this major economic artery disrupted the flow of people and goods for months after the storm and serves

as another example of human-built infrastructure all across the country, not just in this region, that is not built to withstand the changes to our climate that we are now experiencing," he said.

Although the highway damage has been repaired, Hudson said havoc caused by the flood downstream has not received much attention, though the damaged riverbank continues to lose an estimated 4,000 tons of sediment a year.

SEE PROJECT PAGE A5



Hudson

First public electric car-charging station comes to Washburn

BY **RICK OLIVO**
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The age of the electric car has arrived in Bayfield County.

With advances in battery and powertrain technology, the range and performance of all-electric vehicles has expanded to over 400 miles in the top-rated model, with acceleration that rivals gas-line engine models.

The range of even the most modest electric cars allow owners to take them on extended drives, with a very big caveat: They need a high-speed charging station somewhere along the trip.

"I get calls all the time from people in Minneapolis who want to drive to Bayfield County, and they ask if we have a high-speed charging station," said Washburn Mayor and Bayfield County Tourism and Recreation Director Mary Motiff.



Xcel Energy Wisconsin and Michigan President Mark Stoering, left, is joined by Bay Area Rural Transit Director Pat Daoust at a vehicle-charger built at the parking lot of the Bayfield County Courthouse. The station is the result of a partnership between the county, BART and Xcel and is the first of its kind in Bayfield County, capable of charging a vehicle to 80% in an hour. Rick Olivo/Staff Photo

In the past, Motiff has had to tell such callers with chagrin that there weren't any in

the county.

SEE STATION PAGE A5

Ashland homeless shelter moves forward

BY **RICK OLIVO**
rolivo@ashlanddailypress.net

Ashland City Council members approved a plan by a 9-1 vote Tuesday to repurpose the Ashland Motel into a 24-unit emergency residential facility, and now the real work begins for Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency CEO Millie Rounsville.

Rounsville said Wednesday that the agency's offer to purchase the Ashland Motel on the city's west side from the current owner, SAI, Inc., is good until Oct. 14, and the next step for the project is to complete the sale of the property.

"We will close on the property. We will then begin recruiting for staff and volunteers, and once I can actually physically acquire the property then we can do things like updating the electric service, start to get accessibility issues completed so we can accommodate people with physical disabilities," she said. "We need to move as quickly as possible to get people in before it gets cold."

At Tuesday's city council session, Washburn Attorney Linda Coleman warned the council that the proposed conditional use permit violated both state law and the city's own comprehensive plan.

On Wednesday, Coleman, who represented a number of residents at the meeting, said her clients have not yet decided whether to pursue legal action to halt the project, but she believes there are grounds to take the issue to court.

"State law requires that to approve a conditional use permit, the city council must find that there is substantial evidence that the applicant has met the terms that are outlined in the city zoning ordinance," she said.

Coleman said the council failed to meet that burden in at least three of the six required provisions.

"The most clearly relevant is compatibility with existing uses within 200 feet of the proposed use and 500 feet on either direction down the same street, in this case the highway," she said.

Coleman said the uses on the highway were commercial in nature, and the shelter doesn't fall into that category.

She said the shelter would also violate the comprehensive plan because it would be in an area that is waterfront and also in the gateway - the transition into the city. Coleman said the shelter does not match the uses called for by the plan, and should have been placed in an area that allows congregate housing like apartment buildings.

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Pilot program aims to reduce drug-laced mail in prisons

BY EMILY HAMER
Wisconsin State Journal

MADISON (AP) — A new mail policy at Fox Lake Correctional Institution aimed at curbing the infiltration of dangerous drug-laced paper could expand to all prisons, but inmates say their concerns about missing and cut-off documents aren't being addressed.

Under the pilot policy, started in April, inmates receive only photocopies of their mail, not the originals, which staff later shred. The policy doesn't apply to legal documents.

Prisoners say they have seen months-long delays in receiving mail, educational materials denied, missing pages and the margins of letters cut off with no way to get the missing material back.

"Our mail is being shredded with no recourse for us to get the mistakes fixed," inmate Joshua Wade said.

Despite complaints, the Department of Corrections said it could expand the policy given the success it has shown so far in reducing overdoses and violent behavior associated with K2 or "spice."

No inmates at Fox Lake Correctional Institution have died due to an overdose so far this year, Dodge County Medical Examiner PJ Schoebel said.

K2 is an illegal, mind-altering synthetic cannabinoid that can cause symptoms of psychosis, suicidal thoughts, violent behavior, seizures, kidney damage, a reduced supply of blood to the heart, toxic reactions and sometimes death, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Paper can be laced with K2 and then smoked, which is how the drug was getting through the mail, the La Crosse Tribune reported.

DOC spokesperson John Beard said some inmates acted violently toward other inmates or staff while using the drug. Other inmates were found "incoherent or unresponsive" and had to be rushed to the hospital.

"(The mail policy change) was a response to health and safety concerns related to K2 and other synthetic cannabinoids, which can cause unpredictable and dangerous reactions," Beard said. "The incidents among persons in our care at Fox Lake Correctional Institution were alarming."

In April — the peak of the K2 activity — Fox Lake had nine "potential overdoses" and two cases of violent behavior, according to the DOC. By August, both those

numbers had dropped to zero after overdoses and violence trended down over the summer.

There were three potential overdoses in May, three in June and one in July. Violence was less common with one case in May, zero in June and one in July.

Other negative "incidents" included staff catching someone with K2, the discovery of drug paraphernalia, inmates writing letters to from and family asking for K2, and other concerning behavior, Beard said.

Fox Lake had a total of 42 incidents in April alone, a jump from 14 in both February and March.

The total number of incidents trended down in subsequent months, with 11 incidents in May, 14 in June and nine in July.

Beard said the numbers were high in April when the pilot began likely because prisoners likely still had stashes of K2 that they used throughout the month of April. The mail policy went into effect on April 9, but DOC staff believe inmates continued to use paper tainted with synthetic cannabinoid that had already come through the mail, Beard said. There had also already been a dozen incidents within the first week or so of April.

Incidents did not increase when in-person visitation resumed in July.

Beard noted the policy is still a pilot but said it could "potentially" expand to more prisons. Other prisons in Wisconsin have had incidents, but not at the same levels as Fox Lake, he said.

"This is not an issue unique to Wisconsin," Beard said. "Some correctional agencies in other states are considering or have already started making copies of mail across all of their facilities."

Last October, Michigan implemented the same policy across its entire prison system to prevent drugs from coming into its facilities. Now Michigan prisoners only receive photocopies of their mail instead of the originals.

Pennsylvania started its own mail policy in 2018, routing all prisoner mail through a processing facility in Florida that photocopies the mail before sending the copies back to Pennsylvania's prisons.

Peggy West-Schroder, southeast Wisconsin coordinator for EX-incarcerated People Organizing, an inmate advocacy group, said the pilot will "probably become a permanent solution" to drugs coming through the mail in Wisconsin.

She said the policy is "obviously not ideal," especially for those who

are following the rules, but that it's important for preventing overdoses.

"We can't advocate for people getting mail that could kill them," West-Schroder said.

Prisoners say they understand the need to address the drug problem, but that Fox Lake needs to handle their mail with greater care and implement a workable solution for when items are copied incorrectly. That's especially important if the policy gets expanded to the entire prison system, which has been hovering around 20,000 prisoners.

"We're not asking them not to photocopy our mail," Wade said. "We're just asking for some type of way to get things fixed when they mess up the photocopying."

Beard said any issues with the mail are "reviewed and addressed the best we can when the concern is brought forward."

"We continue to work at ensuring this process at (Fox Lake) is the least disruptive as possible to the persons in our care," Beard said. "Our goal is to ensure they get, as close as possible, a representation of the original mail sent to them, while maintaining the safest possible living and working environment."

While Wade said the problems have improved over the last several months, he still gets letters that are cut off or copied incorrectly, and some of his mail is gone for good.

Wade received just 11 pages of a 20-page letter sent by his mom. The top half of his religious studies certificate also got cut off, and now the original has been shredded.

He still often gets letters with the margins cut off and rarely gets any of his mail in color.

Jacob Jaeger, who is also incarcerated at Fox Lake, said he believes the new policy has caused delays in him getting his mail, and some of the educational materials he would have normally received have been denied.

Jaeger said he used to receive dozens of manila envelopes from a friend who would fill them with research papers and study guides in physics, psychology, theology and other subject areas. Currently studying to get a degree in theology, Jaeger said he thinks education is "my only way to stay free once I'm out of here." He said it's the key to preventing himself from turning back to selling drugs.

But shortly after the new mail policy went into effect in April, Jaeger said, he stopped getting a huge chunk of the manila envelopes and would receive others "very late."

» SURGE
FROM PAGE A1

MMC Director of Strategy and Patient Experience Kevin Stranberg said one of the problems with getting an exact handle on the number of COVID patients in the hospital at any given time is the changing nature of the disease.

"In the past, and I am talking about 12 months ago, when we were talking about COVID patients and they were inpatients, they were all so sick that they had incredibly high levels of critical needs," he said.

The cases that are now being seen at MMC ranged from mild ones that never wind up being inpatient cases to moderate cases that get admitted and people with much more severe illness, he said.

"It is a much broader spectrum," Stranberg said, asserting that merely assigning a single number for people being seen for COVID did not reflect the real picture of care being given for the disease at the hospital.

"If you put in the paper there were six COVID patients in the hospital, then what our community is going to react to is, 'Oh my God they have six people on ventilators and they are going to die.' We don't want that image either," he said.

On the same day that Nuutinen made her comments, Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary Karen Timberlake said that hospitals in several areas of Wisconsin are running short of intensive care unit beds, with just 5% of ICU beds available statewide. Data from the Wisconsin Hospital Association showed only 19 ICU beds available for the entire northern half of the state.

On Thursday morning, Memorial Medical Center issued as a press release a letter signed by 42 members of the medical staff urging community members to get vaccinated against COVID.

The letter also recommended that people wear a mask whenever indoors out of their home maintain six-foot social distancing, wash hands and stay home if they are sick.

The letter said that in hospitals and clinics, more people are being seen sick with COVID, some severely ill and requiring life support.

"This amount of illness is straining our medical resources," the letter said.



Stranberg

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"It should be some place where it is off by itself, where you are not going to see it just as you come into town. We are supposed to have a fine-looking city. Well, it's not going to be a fine-looking city any more."

Ronning said if the shelter became a reality, he likely would close down his business and move elsewhere.

"There are other places I can go in a different county," he said.

Sandy Marsland, owner of Sandy Shores Cafe at 2524 Lake Shore Drive West, is just as unhappy with the plan.

"It's frightening; you hear about people with needles all over the ground. I am not going to come into my place of business and find that all over my backyard," she said.

Marsland said she was concerned about the impact to the quality of life in the city caused by homeless people.

"I have lived here my whole life and it was a beautiful city. I was never afraid to walk down the streets until the past few years. I don't want to walk down Main Street any more, with people screaming out windows, throwing things, it's just not right," she said.

Ashland Mayor Debra Lewis, who formed the homeless task force that has been seeking solutions for the problem, said fear of the homeless is unfounded. While she can't promise that nothing bad would ever happen in the city because of a homeless person, she said the shelter would be staffed 24 hours a day and an extensive set of standards would be in place to prevent problems like loitering, alcohol- and drug-related problems or violence at the shelter. Proposed rules for the shelter say no one with a sexual offense record or an arrest warrant would be allowed to stay, and no one with a conviction related to violence would be allowed until five years after the offense. The shelter would be insured and would have a designated smoking area out of public view.

Drug use, weapons, physical or verbal violence or threats, theft or other crimes all would be prohibited and grounds for immediate removal.

Lewis said she understands that homelessness stirs passions, but asked that opponents take the time to understand what's being proposed.

"The majority of people believe that we need to have a place for homeless people," she said. "But there is all kinds of room to disagree about where that is and how it should look. The concern is that this is going to be some kind of flophouse, or some kind of crack house or detox center. It's not going to be any of them."

Lewis also said that Ashlanders have a responsibility to look after other Ashlanders.

"These are not people coming from other places; Well over 90% of the motel vouchers this year went to people who are local, and they don't all look like skid row bums either," she said.



Lewis

» MMC
FROM PAGE A1

The certification follows the guidelines of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, and is awarded when the hospital achieves certification in at least three orthopedic programs.

It is not a distinction that occurred overnight, Signorelli said.

"It was a long process to get things built up both in equipment and staffing, to be able to serve that many patients," he said.

What makes the designation all the more remarkable is that Memorial Medical Center is just the second critical care hospital in the nation to earn it.

"I think it goes along with our theme of providing the highest level of care in a small-town setting," Signorelli said.

He added that the Ashland area community needs a high quality orthopedic service because of the makeup of its population. While the community has many older residents who need such treatment, they are also a relatively active group that is not content to give up favorite activities because of joint issues.

"Whether they are hard-working farmers or more recreation types, they have different expectations of the level of activity and participation



The surgical services wing at Memorial Medical Center is the hospital's newest addition, completed earlier this year. The \$30 million center includes 18 pre- and post-surgery rooms. (Contributed photo)



The MMC orthopedic surgery team is headed up by Dr. Joseph Signorelli (left) and Dr. Justin S. Cummins.

in life that were not previously thought possible," he said. "We really look at age differently now. It's become less tolerated

for someone to say, 'Well I have a bad knee, so I guess my biking days are done.' People still want to get out and enjoy the

great outdoor resources the area has to offer."

The orthopedic center was born in 2018 when MMC administration and the two orthopedic surgeons shared their visions about what they saw as key to the future of orthopedics in the region.

Signorelli said the project is akin to a large construction project, requiring planning and an incredible amount of work to bring into being. Nor does the project end here, he added.

"We have a couple of other really exciting projects that we are working on that are close to being announced," he said.



Back in black:
Pet of the Week kicks off
black-cat awareness month, **A2**

Fan fun:
Oredockers stands filled
with spirit this season, **B1**



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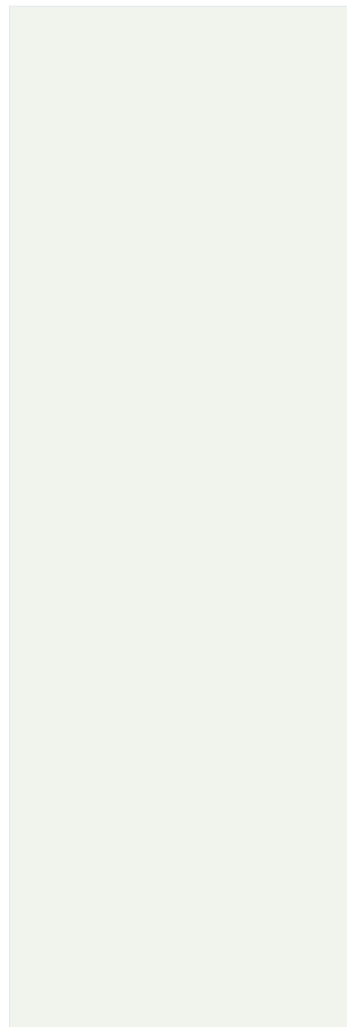


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Ashland to consider homeless shelter permit

Ashland Motel site draws opposition



The Ashland Motel on the city's west side would be converted to a homeless shelter under a plan going before City Council members Tuesday.

BY **RICK OLIVO**
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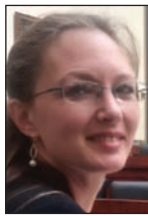
A proposal to purchase the Ashland Motel using federal grant money and turn it into Ashland's first homeless shelter is scheduled to be voted on by City Council members Tuesday.

The shelter would be managed by the Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency and already has been recommended for approval by the Ashland Plan Commission.

NWCSA Chief Executive Officer Millie Rounsville said a \$700,000 grant for the proposed shelter's purchase and remodeling has been awarded to the city.

"They won't own or operate the shelter, but in order to apply for the grant, you had to be a local unit of government," she said.

Rounsville said NWCSA has operated a shelter in Superior since 1999 and has served homeless people



Rounsville

with hotel vouchers in five counties. A shelter is a far better alternative for the homeless than a voucher that covers a few days in a motel, she said.

Typically people are allowed to stay at the shelter for 30 days, giving them time to find a more permanent situation.

"We will have case management that will assure that they are getting any benefits they are entitled to and that they may need, and will work with our partner agencies to identify longer-term solutions. It gives homeless people the additional breathing time they need to try and accomplish some of their goals," she said.

Rounsville said the community has needed a shelter for years.

"There just hasn't been an opportunity that has existed to this point that would allow the financial resources for a building," she said.

That changed when federal COVID funds became available to the city, which agreed to apply through a special coronavirus-related Community Development Block Grant program.

Rounsville began in spring scouring the city for a homeless shelter site, and was able to reach an agreement with the owner of the Ashland Motel.

The motel at 2300 Lake Shore Drive West is in the center of a small group of highway businesses. Business owners spoken to by the Daily Press were unanimously opposed to developing the shelter there.

"It shouldn't be just as you are coming into town," said Robert Ronning, owner of Home-town Auto at 2525 Lake Shore Drive West, a used car dealership. "The kind of clientele they are going to have there is not going to be good for the city. It's going to look like a slum."

Ronning said he feared the location would soon wind up littered, and that the neighborhood would see increased thefts and drug use.



Ronning

SEE SHELTER PAGE A5

MMC reports normal ops despite COVID surge

BY **RICK OLIVO**
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Officials at Memorial Medical Center say COVID-19 cases are up at the hospital, but that the hospital has not had to make any changes to standard operating procedures and admissions for other medical procedures continue as normal.

MMC Chief Operating Officer Jessica Nuutinen said both COVID and non-COVID cases are up at the hospital, but that the hospital retains enough capacity to deal with both classes of patients.

"Operationally we have not changed. We continue to do business as usual," she said.



Nuutinen

Nuutinen declined to say how many COVID-19 cases were being treated on an inpatient basis at MMC.

"I'm not going to share that information, and here's the reason why: our census can change on an hourly basis, daily basis. Right now we are able to take care of our COVID and our non-COVID patients," she said.

Nuutinen also declined to give even an approximate number of inpatient COVID patients.

"What I can tell you is that we are not full, we are not at capacity. We are still able to admit COVID patients and we are still able to admit non-COVID patients."

According to the state Department of Health Services, Ashland County recorded more than 60 new virus cases in the week that ended Friday, with 4.7% of those tested coming back positive. It and every other county in the state save Bayfield County was listed as having high transmission rates, and health officials say almost all new diagnoses involve non-immunized patients who contracted the delta variant of COVID. About 70% of Ashland County residents are fully vaccinated and about 65 percent of Bayfield County residents have had both shots.

Nuutinen said it's difficult even to say how many MMC beds are available every day because the hospital has a "surge plan" that allows the facility to use increase the number of beds available if the number of COVID patients threatened to go above the hospital's legally allowable number of patients.

"We can convert other rooms into COVID rooms if we need to, but that has not happened," she said.

SEE SURGE PAGE A5

MMC orthopedics named Center of Excellence

BY **RICK OLIVO**
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Little more than three years ago, Memorial Medical Center doctors performed about 25 joint replacements a year. Since then, that number has grown exponentially to the point that the hospital performs about 500 joint replacements a year.

That phenomenal growth in orthopedic procedures is being credited to the arrival of two orthopedic surgeons, Dr. Joseph Signorelli and Dr. Justin S. Cummins, who came to Ashland after spending about a decade practicing in Duluth.

"We both got kind of fed up with the corporate medicine model," said Signorelli, who said the multiple layers of administration of a larger hospital made it more difficult to practice medicine the way they wanted.

"So we were both looking



Memorial Medical Center's new surgical center recently was named an Orthopedic Center of Excellence. In three years, MMC has gone from performing 25 joint replacements a year to about 500 annually. (Contributed photo)

for an opportunity where we could practice a high level of orthopedic care, but in a small town where the patients were happy to go for care, and all the employees and providers are happy to work there as well," he said.

Under their leadership, Memorial Medical Center recently was designated an Orthopaedic Center of Excellence by DNV, an international certification organization.

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