

Learn to rock — two ways — with FeU

Fe University will offer two new classes beginning the first week of June, one teaching students how to rock and the other teaching about the rocks under their feet.

With three decades of experience teaching music, Rusty Wulff helps normal folks find their musical footing and express the rhythm within. Students will learn to play guitar and drums in a laid-back, collaborative class for beginning musicians. Intended for working adults as well

as seniors, Doing Music from the Inside Out is 6-8 p.m., Thursdays, June 2, 9, 16, and 23, at the Mercer Community Center. Class is \$35.

Geology might sound abstract, but it's written into our landscape, visible if you know what story to look for. Geology for Tourists, sponsored by Mercer Library and Fe University, will help students to understand the 3-billion-year tale of the Northwoods landscape in two offerings. First, a free presentation by Richard Thiede at the

Mercer Community Center on June 3 at 10 a.m., followed the next day by a bus tour in Iron County with Thiede and Tony Stella from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Bus tour is \$50, including bus ride and box lunch; registration required.

Register online at feuniversity.org, or download a form and send a check to: Fe University, PO Box 63, Hurley, WI 54534. Questions about registration? Call 906-285-7517 or 715-862-0210.

Information provided by FeUniversity.



(Contributed photo)



Kenzie Nemeč (from left), Stanislaus Kaszuba, Ben Oberholzer and Harry Diesburg power through a Led Zeppelin tune as they rehearse for next month's Rockonsin competition. The Ashland High School students will compete against other garage bands from across the state. Not pictured is Tristan Pankratz (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)



Kenzie Nemeč adds her own vocal style to cover songs the band plays. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

» SUMMERFEST

FROM PAGE A1

They may be young, but they love to listen to classic rock legends Led Zeppelin, Pearl Jam, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Kansas, among others.

"I got into playing guitar through Led Zeppelin. When I played 'Stairway to Heaven,' I would skip to the guitar solo every time. But now I appreciate and love the whole song," Kaszuba said.

Inspired by their favorite musicians, the high school rockers love to play together and have become friends through their love of music.

"This makes it more enjoyable and fun," Pankratz said.

But LittleStitious has some work to do before they are ready to perform at Rockonsin in front of thousands of people during Milwaukee's Summerfest. They're now working on

If You Go

- What: Local student-band LittleStitious performance
- Where: Black Cat in Ashland
- When: 6 p.m.
- Entry fee: \$3

learning some new tunes before the gig on June 24 and 25.

They may be performing against students from school districts

twice their size, but they're not letting that scare them.

"Just because the school is bigger, doesn't mean they play better," Oberholzer said.

Before they perform in Milwaukee, they are set to play at Ashland's Black Cat on Saturday, May 21, starting at 6 p.m.

With lots of time to get ready, they aren't worried and are "ready to light the stage up," Oberholzer said.



Stanislaus Kaszuba jams on his guitar. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

» SHELTER

FROM PAGE A1

"I'm not saying to put them in prime locations, but they got to go somewhere," she said. "Maybe limit them to three camps per area so they're not overcrowded."

There is a common misconception that those who are homeless are drug addicts or criminals. But the shelter so far has helped fire victims burned out of their homes, renters who lost their apartments when the owner sold their property and victims of

domestic violence.

And while the shelter has helped 40-plus people move on, it hasn't been easy. Every available apartment in town, like the shelter itself, usually has a waiting list.

"We need affordable blousing. Affordable housing is

huge," Olbekson said.

To help house more clients, Crenshaw said plans are underway to renovate another wing of the former hotel. But even when those 10 rooms become available, it won't meet local needs, Olbekson and Crenshaw said.

"We're a band aid, but we're a band aid on a giant arm," Crenshaw said. "If we lived in the best version of a community where people would care for their neighbors, people wouldn't have to worry about what they are going to do for shelter."

» HOMELESS

FROM PAGE A1

I stayed in the downstairs of their cabin in Iron River from September until last month when I found our current home back in Ashland. Going to Iron River came with the hope of having one single spot my daughter and I could be in together — to at least have one location for her things and mine. But the commute was about 35 minutes, not doable in the winter with the car I eventually got, and not doable at all for her during her senior year. She was president of National Honor Society, trying to negotiate college admissions and

scholarships, and we had to give up doing those things together.

Being separated from her our last year together was worse than the rat race of trying to beat dozens of other people in Ashland who also lost their homes they rented, specifically to be sold to become Airbnbs.

I can't describe the feeling of going to work here last summer, waiting tables in the tourist season, welcoming them, banking on tips in case I found a place to stay or could offer a friend cash for their couch out of pride, knowing these tourists were getting the hotel and motel rooms I wasn't allowed to get

because I was a local (without an address).

The stress started affecting my health so I began researching and recently got to tell my story about that via video at a conference in Milwaukee after having found a place I could put the pieces back together.

My daughter and I have a few months of our last year together before she goes to Hamline University in St. Paul, Minn. It's still hard to get used to not having to plan day-in and day-out what to try next; worrying because I couldn't get a place (if I could find one) without

a job, or trying to find a new job without a place to live while working at a job I had picked up in Iron River.

I'd been beaten to rentals I'd applied for and waited to hear back on many times and was desperate enough to pay the sky-rocketed rent (a drastic change from July 2021 to now; my two-story house last year was \$750 while one- to three-bedroom apartments now go for \$900 to \$1,000 a month).

A lot of anger accompanied the other emotions so I'm trying my best to remember there's only

a little time left with my daughter, to drop what happened and plan the graduation and enjoy it because we are here now, no matter how quick it is going to be.

"Home is where you are, mom," she told me once over the phone when I was in Iron River, and I cried. I was grateful she knew that, but also stuck with a hard fact

of homelessness — there wasn't anywhere for us to go home to.

Amy Sprague now has a permanent home in Ashland and works as multimedia account executive for the Daily Press.

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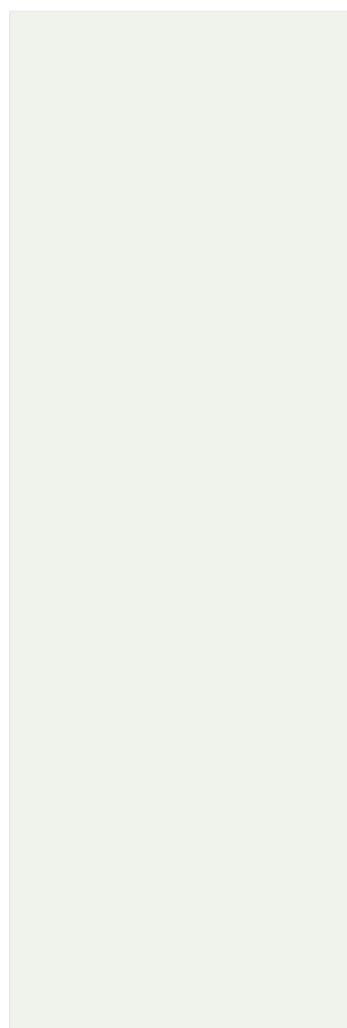


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Kat Whitten, case manager at Ashland's homeless shelter, pours a cup of coffee for resident Shannon Bozenik. There is so much demand for space at the shelter that managers are renovating 10 additional rooms at the former hotel. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

Homeless shelter expanding

Five months in, facility has helped more than 50 clients

BY **TOM STANKARD,**
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

There is so much demand for housing in the Bay Area that when Ashland's new homeless shelter has a vacancy it is filled within a couple hours.

It has been that way since the shelter opened at the beginning of the year, Director Paige Crenshaw said.

Now that all of the 21 rooms are available — when it opened, some rooms of the former hotel on Lakeshore Drive were not yet ready — Crenshaw said she, Case Manager Kat Whitten and a team of volunteers have worked almost nonstop to get clients back on their feet.

On the first day the shelter opened, clients were lined up waiting for space, seeking shelter from the winter weather, Crenshaw said. Some had been

"couch-surfing," moving from one friend's home to another. Others were living in their cars or even camping.

In five months, the shelter has housed more than 50 clients, some of whom have moved on to permanent housing, others who still are at the shelter.

But the new shelter, the first of its kind in Ashland, hasn't been able to solve the Bay Area's homeless problem. Filled to capacity, it is forced to turn people away every week.

When that happens, people will do whatever it takes to stay alive, said Jeanna Olbekson, director of the nonprofit Ashland Homeless Help.

"I've heard of homeless riding it out on their own," she said. "It's not something I recommend."

Riding it out means sleeping under bridges, in storage units or any pretty much anywhere that offers shelter from the weather.

Now that spring is here, Olbekson wants Ashland officials to allow homeless residents to pitch tents at

city parks. That's now illegal and the city typically throws people out of parks and confiscates their property when they're caught, she said.

"(Crewmembers) come and demolish people's camps while they're out. Everything will be uprooted and thrown away and they're not given access to get their stuff back," she said.

It is legal to pitch a tent on private property, "but if they have private property, they're probably not homeless to begin with," she said.

With that in mind, she hopes the city will grant homeless residents permission to camp in spots typically out of sight of the public.

"We don't want homeless encampments or tent cities," she stressed. "We have a community that needs to be addressed."

Olbekson envisions designated spots for homeless residents, perhaps by the hot pond or Prentice Park. If homeless do camp at parks, she wants them to place some sort of identifier so they don't have to worry about their property being seized.

SEE SHELTER PAGE A5

My year living homeless

Last spring, almost exactly one year ago, the house I rented with my daughter was sold to be flipped, I was told, with no further explanation.

We had three months to pack up a two-story house and find another place. Storage units were at max capacity but I found one while I bounced around — from friends' couches to the one motel in town that will rent to locals to cheap cabins at various places in and outside of Ashland County. I even considered the beach a few times because it's expensive to be homeless.

During all this, I worked and applying for rentals that rarely came up, walking with a duffel bag in which I kept essentials because I



The author and her daughter now have a permanent home in Ashland after spending most of a year couch-surfing and searching for a place to live. (Contributed photo)

never knew for sure where I'd go each day. My daughter stayed at her father's house,

though he mostly works out of town, which was the worst part. She was mostly by herself.

I couldn't handle the overwhelming stress anymore, and my mother called me when I missed a day of work, waiting tables at a local restaurant. I just couldn't do it or see the point when I didn't even have a place to live.

How could I ask tourists one more friendly question about their travels while worrying all the while where I was going to go after work, where could I stay, who could I ask? My mother, knowing I wouldn't say how bad it was, said she could hear it in my voice and that she was coming to get me.

SEE HOMELESS PAGE A5

Ashland High School students set to rock at Milwaukee's Summerfest

BY **TOM STANKARD,**
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

It was a normal bar gig for Ashland musician Brett Hulmer.

Then Tristan Pankratz's dad walked up to him and asked if his son could perform with him.

As the Ashland High School band director, Hulmer welcomed the opportunity, expecting the teenager from Glidden to hop on the bar's stage with an acoustic guitar and start strumming.



But boy was he wrong. The young musician brought an electric guitar and a gigantic amplifier, ready to rock.

"Then he started playing and I was like, 'Holy smokes,'" Hulmer said.

Pankratz, who attends Chequamegon High School, was just the guitarist Hulmer was looking for to complete a high school rock band capable of going head-to-head with other garage bands from across Wisconsin.

It was a prescient decision. The band of students from Ashland and Chequamegon high schools, LittleStitious — a name taken from a scene in "The Office" — has just been selected to perform during Rockonsin, a state-wide competition for student-musicians of all music genres set for next month.

When Hulmer asked him to join the group, Pankratz didn't hesitate. The aspiring lead guitarist joined Kenzie Nemeo on vocals, Stanislaus Kaszuba on rhythm guitar, Ben Oberholtzer on drums and Harry Diesburg on bass. Not knowing what to expect, though, Hulmer was worried the five wouldn't have the chemistry to perform well together.

"Normally you wouldn't be able to pull people together and say, 'Hey, be friends.' But I wanted to use the music as a tool to bring them together," he said.

It worked. Though the five come from different backgrounds, they combine their skills to make a sound that Hulmer said he hasn't heard in years.

Playing guitar has become second nature for Pankratz. Though he has only been performing for a handful of years, he is able to shred solos and melt faces, Hulmer said.

Nemeo is no stranger to the stage, having performed for as long as she can remember. Then there's Kaszuba, who really only started listening to music when he was a teenager.

SEE SUMMERFEST PAGE A5

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» BAYFIELD

FROM PAGE A1

The school was essentially shut down for two weeks starting during the second week of January.

It wasn't exactly what DePerry had in mind for her final high school season.

"Basketball has always been a favorite sport of mine," she said. "I've enjoyed playing it for years, and thinking about my season I was very excited and looking forward to playing it with some of my favorite girls. Excited was an understatement for me."

In addition to playing, DePerry was looking forward to being a team leader. Even when the team lost several payers, DePerry was determined to play on.

"We played the cards we were dealt," she said.

Then despite their most heroic efforts, COVID hit and forced a halt to the season.

"It's a bummer," she said. "I ended up on close quarantine, and then I got a case of it. That took me out a little after Christmas break, and I wasn't able to practice with my girls, to help teach them like usual."

Several team members wound up in isolation or came down with the disease. At some practices, there were just two or three team members, said Bayfield High School Athletic Director Kaela Swanson.

By the time the virtual school interruption ended, the outlook for the balance of the girls' schedule was nothing short of dreadful.

"I told our coach Joe Corbine that if wanted to keep playing with our six players, we would only have about three weeks to play the rest of the season," Swanson said.

With a heavy heart, Corbine and Swanson conferred with the commis-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY KAELE SWANSON.

Bayfield Girls Basketball Team Captain Leora DePerry takes a jump shot in a game with Drummond before the season was cancelled because of scheduling difficulties caused by a two-week shutdown of the Bayfield Schools caused by COVID-19. Since the cancellation of the girls season, DePerry has become a manager for the Bayfield boys basketball team.

sioner of the Indianhead Conference and came to the conclusion that such a scenario was impossible and unfair to the girls.

"It's one of those things where you don't have closure and it is difficult to deal with," Corbine said. "But I feel that it was the right thing to do, but to end in that fashion has to hurt the most, especially with the two seniors who had been playing for most of the last four years and looking forward to their last year."

Corbine said the season was one where the team was never able to meet their goals of growing as a team because of all of the outside complications.

"It was surreal," he said. "In the end, for the safety of the girls, we had to cancel."

Even now, Corbine admits that he is heartbroken over

the decision, necessary as it was, and he feels a sense of personal responsibility for it.

"There is certainly not any blame on the athletes at all. There are a million other things that I could have probably tried, if I had a chance to. Looking at it you have nothing but hindsight — I wish I could have done this, or done that. In the end, it hurts," he said.

It is a sense of loss that is shared by everyone associated with Trollers Girls Basketball.

"It is really frustrating to me, as the team captain and as a senior who really, really wanted her season to be great, I felt really let down," DePerry said. "But I think the best decision now is to let everyone focus on academics and cheer on our boys team."

That is exactly what DePerry has done. Since the girls' schedule has been cancelled, she has become a manager for the boys basketball team.

"I've got some close friends and other seniors who are on the team. We all grew up together so I decided to join and be a manager for the boys," she said. "I love being able to help them when I'm needed."

That help includes being able to jump in and work on things like defensive drills with the boys.

"Just the feeling of being on the court and holding the ball makes me feel at home," she said. "Although it was frustrating the way the girls season ended, it was a lot of fun too, and now I can still have fun, being a manager with the boys," she said.

» SHELTER

FROM PAGE A1

Each guest is also connected which a case manager who helps get him or her back out in society on the right foot.

"(The case manager can) connect them with a public health worker, help sign them up for SNAP food benefits, and figure out what their goals are. As you can imagine, most are related to housing. A lot of folks don't know there's a program at the Brick that will help them pay for the first month's rent. So these programs are out there, it's just connecting people to them. We don't do all the work for everybody; we want to see them take initiative. It's really exciting to see them progress," Crenshaw said.

Another case manager has been hired so the shelter can accept more guests, she pointed out. Once the case manager starts working at the end of the month, Crenshaw said they would reevaluate where they are at and discuss opening up the remaining 10 rooms at the shelter.

In the future, they plan to expand to the neighboring building that would offer 10 more rooms for guests in need of shelter.

"(We) need to go through the process of updating that building. There would be a lot of possibilities," she said.

Each guest the shelter has welcomed has been "awesome" and very polite, Scheid said.

This may be a surprise to some who were worried that the shelter would cause the crime rate to increase in the area surrounding the shelter.

"I haven't heard anything. That's a common concern people have. If you have a new development, definitely the level of crime could go up. But I haven't heard anything," Crenshaw said.

Since plans for the shelter were announced, the community has embraced it for the most part.

"Everyday I have someone stopping in who saw something in the paper or read something on Facebook and are inquiring about volunteering here. Some come in to do cleaning and facilities work. Some work at the front desk. It's a range of responsibilities people that people do. It's nice to see people stepping up in the community," Crenshaw said.



Crenshaw



Corbine

» MAYOR

FROM PAGE A1

Q: What qualifies you to be mayor?

Ortman: I think my experience in the political arena as councilor and board supervisor makes me qualified. Was in the Air Force for 20 years. I learned how government works. Had to learn how to get things done when a lot of different people have a say.

Mettile: I have experience. I have served Ashland in public service roles throughout my time here. Served as councilor, was council president twice. I have served on the Public Works Committee, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. Currently, I serve on the Board of Review and the Planning Commission. I'm very well versed at what goes on at City Hall.

Folks know how I approach things. I have a good track record of making decisions while remembering that this is a city of 8,000 people and serve in their best interest. Folks know that I can do that.

MacKenzie: I have quite a bit of leadership training in the military. I've lived here a number of years now. I've spent quite a bit of time on county board, been on city council. Been on many committees in the city and public works planning commission. I've got strong awareness of the work that needs to be done.

With my background and time, I think I'd be a good fit for the city. Been on the county board for 20 years, council for three years. Got quite a lot of time in law enforcement. I'm used to dealing with the public and providing a service.

Q: What would you hope to accomplish as mayor?

Ortman: We need to look at our water as the gift it is and find ways to retain every drop. We need to landscape to retain water. Slowing the flow and increasing the absorption of water will reduce pressure on our storm water system and help charge our aquifers. This approach will help alleviate damage from potential historic rain levels. I will work with the County Land and Water Conservation office to find ways to implement already developed strategies.

The western United States is in rough shape water-wise. Climate change is drastically changing the living environment of many places. Our area is relatively unaffected and is still a great place to live. I suspect as or if conditions worsen in other areas people will be moving to more livable areas like ours. We need a plan to welcome and integrate new people should this

happen.

Mettile: Residents of Ashland need to trust and have faith in their local government again. Part of that is because so much happens that they're not aware that they don't get to see, that they're told about after the fact. One of my biggest goals is throwing open those doors as I tried to do previously.

When I was on council, I held listening sessions and talked on social media all the time to get the word out about stuff. I would try to mend that gap between the people who make the town amazing.

MacKenzie: I want to lead by example. Be respectful, open, transparent.

I want to see support for tourism and host businesses. I'd like to see us make Ashland a destination, not a drive-through. Our history is important, and I'd like to see us showcase that some more because it's what created the current charm of Ashland.

I want to support current businesses and economic development and see a larger, stronger business sector. Been on the Finance Committee. I know what sales tax does for our community. It helps us offset our other taxes, so if we could do anything to make that

stronger, of course that helps us all.

Want to see us look at spending and the current landholdings the city has because we are in a crunch where we don't have the ability to generate a lot more money.

Would like to see us get to the point where we don't have a new assessment or new tax in town without first having a public hearing or a referendum to get a feel where people are on some of that stuff.

It all comes out of the same wallet, whether it's the city, the county or the school district. If there are more things we can do together, we got to look at it.

Want to make it a top priority to fix our roads and the plowing plan for our residential streets. Think we do a wonderful job on some of that stuff, think we need to review it and make sure we're meeting everyone's needs.

Want to see us continue to address the sanitary sewers and the storm-water runoff concerns. Hopefully help improve the Lake Superior water quality and the protection of it. We have to remember that's the water we drink. Whatever we can do to make it cleaner, we should.

Want to see us work on safety issues. We need to

keep that as best we can and in a positive direction. Whatever we can do to make our community safer is going to attract people. We have a superior police and fire department.

Q: How would you address the city's budget concerns?

Ortman: What we're doing now isn't working. If people treated their house how we treat the roads, we would be bulldozed and evicted. I want to make a plan that puts it on the debt levy. That's the only tool we have without begging people through a referendum. I would like to figure out how much would we need to borrow against the debt levy to get the dire needs repaired. I don't know that that's going to be. My hair might stand on end. Want to look at it real hard and tell people what it is. Have public hearings about when it would end. At some point we have to pay for these things.

Mettile: We can have a lot of conversation. As mayor, I would push to begin budgeting process sooner than we do. Our city staff work hard and make really difficult decisions with the city budget. Councilors need to be involved in that process.

MacKenzie: As we look toward the future,

we can look at reducing some things. If I were elected, I would look at making whatever savings we could. After all, a good portion of Ashland is in the poverty level and these taxes are not easy for all our neighbors to come up with.

Q: What is your stance on the recently passed wheel tax?

Ortman: Voted against the wheel tax, along with councilors Richard L. Puffall and Elizabeth Franek.

Mettile: I would have voted against the wheel tax. We can tell people if we want nice things, we have to pay from them. At the same time, the right answer is not always increasing taxes and fees. Understood both sides of the issue.

MacKenzie: No question about it. I was at the meeting and spoke out against. Biggest thing for me on that, communication on that could have been better. I think there's better ways to raise the money that's needed. The general debt levy would have been good solution.

It all comes out of the same wallet. If there are some way we can make it fair for everybody, no one loves paying their taxes, but most of us are reasonable people and realize it's something we got to do.

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MAILING LABEL ONLY

Community shelter now available for homeless



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

Kirsten Scheid works at the first desk at the Ashland Community Shelter Tuesday. She is one of about 20 volunteers who help keep the shelter running 24 hours a day.

BY TOM STANKARD, tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

Kirsten Scheid witnessed her friends struggling with being homeless.

Seeing them go through the hardships that come with it broke her heart and inspired her to do anything she could to help out.

Then the Ashland Community Shelter reached out to the public asking for people to volunteer and she signed up.

"I can see it's a big problem, especially in the winter, and it's kind of an invisible problem," she said.

Scheid is one of about 20 volunteers who donate their time to keep the homeless shelter operating around the clock since it started accepting guests last month.

Still getting the feel for things, shelter director Paige Crenshaw said just 11 of the 21 rooms at the former Ashland Motel are available for guests for the time being.

On the first day the shelter accepted guests, people were lining up to get a room and the shelter reached capacity in two days, Crenshaw said.

Having been surviving on



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

Guests are able to log onto the internet at the shelter to enable them to connect to loved one and apply for jobs.

the street and living in precarious situations, the shelter provides a much-needed roof over their head.

"They're mostly thankful that they're able to be here and grateful to have a place where they can be safe. A lot of folks come from unsafe situations and knowing there's always going to be someone here is a welcoming thought for a lot of people," Crenshaw said.

But the shelter is more than just a place for homeless people to stay at and warm up, she stressed.

The goal of those at the

shelter is to make sure they can provide the best services to guests so they can turn their life around rather than accept too many guests and have people frequently return to the shelter, she noted.

In addition to a bed, it offers a kitchen, a laundry facility, a living room complete with books and a TV and an office with laptops available so they can access the internet and apply for jobs and connect with people.

SEE SHELTER PAGE A5

COVID forces frustrating end to Bayfield girls basketball season

Scheduling issues, loss of players cuts season short

BY RICK OLIVO, rolivo@ashlanddailypress.net

Leora DePerry is an active 17-year-old senior at Bayfield High School, veteran captain of the girls basketball team and at the beginning of the season, she was set to mentor and guide the younger players on her squad.

But things didn't work out as planned.

A couple of players had to leave the team because of academic issues, with a few more deciding that basketball wasn't for them. Six games into the season the Bayfield girls had yet to notch their first win, and then the final blow struck.

COVID-19.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY KAELA SWANSON.

Bayfield girls team members huddle during one of the six games the team managed to play before their season was cancelled.

With the Omicron variant raging, and the team that started out with 11 girls had shrunk down to six. Then because of the coronavirus, the Bayfield Schools went to

virtual classes and all extra-curricular activities were abruptly cancelled, including athletics.

SEE BAYFIELD PAGE A5

Four vie for Ashland mayor

BY TOM STANKARD, tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

Four candidates are on the Feb. 15 primary ballot vying to become the next mayor of Ashland following Mayor Deb Lewis's announcement that she would not seek another term.

The candidates are:

- Matthew MacKenzie, 64, a retired Department of Natural Resources warden and supervisor on the Ashland County Board



MacKenzie

- David Mettill, 37, the communications director for a non-profit who serves on the Ashland Planning Commission



Mettill

- Charles Ortman, 61, a retired Air Force linguist and analyst who serves on the Ashland City Council and Ashland County Board



Ortman

- Richard J. Pufall, who did not respond to repeated interview requests for this story.

The Daily Press interviewed Ortman, Mettill and Mackenzie to give voters an idea of their views and plans.

The two top candidates will move to the spring election in April. The mayor makes \$18,290, including benefits, per year.

Question: Why are you running?

Ortman: I ran once before. Glad I did. Looking back on it, I wasn't prepared as I should have been. I think I have some good leadership skills I acquired in the service and want to solve some of the issues the city is struggling with, which mostly is not having enough money for the needs.

I've been on city council and county board for a number of years. I have a feel for how things get done and know the process. Have the maturity and leadership skills and think I have a good vision.

Mettill: I decided to run because so many people asked me to. I did some soul-searching. Ashland is the place I love, the place I call home. If that many people asked me to, I should.

MacKenzie: I had people ask me. Looking at things, I realize I've got skill sets that would be good for that direction. Why not? I got the time. I'm retired from my other work I used to do and want to serve my community.

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» MOVE

FROM PAGE A1

"Some people had really bad allergic reactions to the basement, and it was hard on some of the singers," said Big Top Musical Director Ed Willett.

It was so confined that Willett called it "chaotic." "Every once in a while I had to tell people to shut up, because I couldn't hear anybody," Willett said, laughing.

That is finally changing, not just for the Blue Canvas Orchestra but for all of the Big Top crew who are moving their base of operations about 12 miles north to the outskirts of Bayfield and a new headquarters at the intersection of Highway J and Highway 13. The performances will remain in the familiar blue tent at the Mount Ashwabay ski hill, but the business itself is leaving its downtown Washburn building.

The new building once housed the Northern Edge Sports Bar and the Fore'n Aft restaurant. The Big Top bought the property about three years ago and has been gradually remodeling it to fit its needs, Executive Director Terry Matier said.

"It took us a while to get a plan and to get the funds together to actually get it renovated," she said. "We are not quite done but we are getting very close. Right now our old office is full of boxes waiting to go over."

Matier said the new gift shop is still pretty bare and there's no furniture or stage appointments for the Backstage Event Center.

"But that will come in

time. By summer we should be able to have a grand opening and show you all the new digs," she said.

The new events space is one of the features that Matier finds most exciting.

"It will seat about 100 people so we can have year-around Blue Canvas Orchestra events, and we can do things with students and interact with the schools, something we couldn't do much of because they were always off in the summer when we had access to the stage," she said.

The old building has been sold to a developer who plans to use it to roast coffee and lease out some space for offices.

Meanwhile, work continues with the finishing touches inside and out on the new Big Top home. Matier said one advantage is that there will be a lot more space for administrative tasks, and that's important for the organization's future.

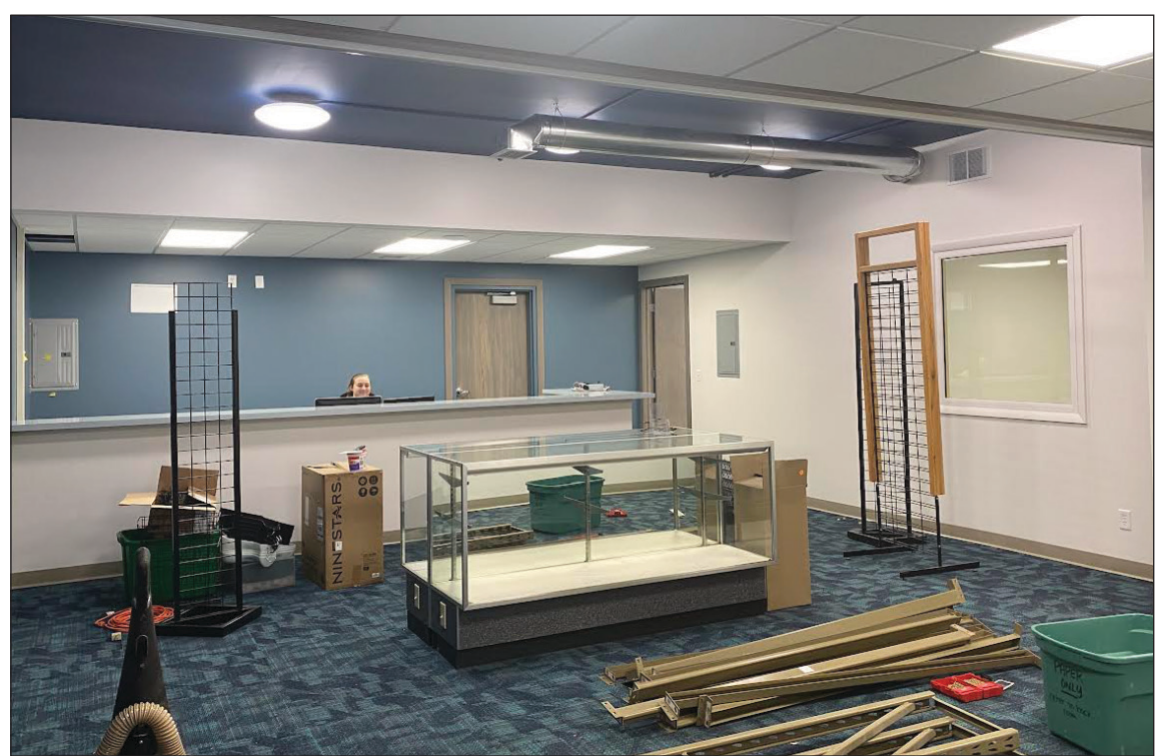
"We've got a long-term plan to grow and be secure, and it's going quite well," she said.

As for the members of the Blue Canvas Orchestra, the new Events Center is a cause for celebration, Willett said.

"We will be able to get enough space between us to have our own little sonic world, so we are not just stepping on each others toes all the time. That will be great. We are looking forward to it," he said.



Matier



Sitting behind her counter and getting things organized at the future box office and gift shop is Box Office Manager Vanessa Gordon.



The former Northern Edge Sports Bar and Fore'n Aft restaurant has gradually been remodeled and updated for the move. (Photo contributed by Big Top Chautauqua)



John Hunt of Hunt Electric installs lighting fixtures in the new Event Center. The center will seat up to 100 people for year around events. (Contributed photo)

» SHELTER

FROM PAGE A1

Despite the negative voices, Crenshaw said that the community has been mostly supportive of the shelter, part of the reason she wanted to move back to Ashland in the first place.

"People here care for each other and have a genuine sense of community that is not found in any other place," she said.

Volunteers are needed to fill overnight shifts, ensuring the building is secure and clients are cared for, Crenshaw said. Daytime volunteers are also needed to help clients and answer calls when Crenshaw isn't there. Volunteers to do facilities work around the shelter like shampooing carpets and installing weather stripping are also needed.

» LAGREW

FROM PAGE A1

The last time anyone heard from Ricard, she told a coworker that she would return shortly and left the Even Start building with LaGrew. Her family later that day reported her missing.

Police later found a recording in Ricard's office of LaGrew asking Ricard to take a ride with him so he could discuss with her complaints made by a coworker.

By piecing together witness statements, video surveillance recordings and other evidence, police learned that a woman had been heard screaming June 27, 2003, in the Braden Road area in which Ricard's body was later found. They also got varying statements from LaGrew about when and where he had met with Ricard.

In ensuing years, police received numer-

ous tips about Ricard's killing. Then-Bayfield County Sheriff Robert Follis told the Daily Press in 2005 that thousands of man-hours had been devoted to the investigation and at least twice police believed they were close to cracking the case, only to have suspects cleared.

"It's something we work on every day, every day," Follis said at the time.

The criminal complaint filed March 19 does not say what prompted police to again question LaGrew on March 18. It says Red Cliff Police Chief Kyle Cadotte and Special Agent Gerald Katchka interviewed LaGrew in

the morning and LaGrew again denied that he had left the Even Start building with Ricard.

Later that afternoon, the officers again met with LaGrew and arrested him. At that time, he said, "Yeah, you got me," and "I did it," according to court records.

LaGrew went on to say he had met with Ricard and taken a ride in his truck with her to tell her he intended to fire her from her job, and she told him she would get a lawyer.

At some point, that

turned into an argument.

"Michael LaGrew reached into the back of his truck and grabbed a trailer jack and hit the victim with that trailer

jack in the head," court records allege. He then dragged her body into the woods, hit her in the head again and checked Ricard for a pulse.

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NEW HOLLAND



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Homeless shelter seeks volunteers



Volunteer Pat Ondarko, left, leads a training session for volunteers at the Ashland Community Shelter earlier this month.

BY **TOM STANKARD**,
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

Paige Crenshaw wanted to move back to Ashland but was waiting for the right opportunity.

That was when the Northland College graduate found a job posting online for a position as director of the homeless shelter taking shape at the former Ashland Motel.

"I knew it was the job that I needed," she said, smiling.

Crenshaw brings a particular sensibility to the job: She nearly ended up homeless herself at 19 years old when her mom was diagnosed with a terminal illness. The experience opened her eyes to the world and she believes the shelter position is a great opportunity to help people.

The Ashland Community Shelter now is ready to open, but Crenshaw need one more critical ingredient before that can happen — more volunteers to staff the facility around the clock and provide services for clients.



Crenshaw

More Information

Volunteer training sessions will be held Jan. 23 from 3-4:30 p.m. at the shelter located at 2330 Lake Shore Drive W. An enrollment form on the Ashland Community Shelter's Facebook page must be completed by anyone who wants to volunteer.

To recruit more community members, Crenshaw is hosting training sessions this month to help prospective volunteers know exactly what will be expected of them.

A handful of community members from all walks of life attended the first session last week, eager to learn how they can help.

Among them was Pat Ondarko, a local pastor who already donates her time to projects that help uplift the community. She has been to many shelters through her profession and said that Ashland's will be unique.

"In regular shelters, people come in and sleep in a church, a building, or a gymnasium. They leave at 8 a.m. and have to be gone until nighttime again," she said.

The Ashland Community Shelter will be more than just an emergency shelter, Crenshaw said. Guest will have access to food, a community room, a laundry facility and computers to access the Internet and apply for jobs to get their lives back on track.

"That gives people hope," Ondarko said.

When the city approved the shelter last year, some neighbors voiced opposition, concerned about it hurting the city's image and security risks that could come with it.

Trevor Martin, co-owner of Ashland Lock and Key, was at the training session and said that the stigma surrounding homelessness, which leads to those baseless fears, needs to stop.

Crenshaw agreed. "We have this sense that homeless people aren't like us," she said. "The reality is, homelessness is not that far away and we are in a false sense of security."

Martin, along with the other volunteers at the session, said he wants to donate time to help clients realize that they're people who deserve both dignity and a hand up.

SEE SHELTER PAGE A5

Red Cliff official convicted in 2003 homicide

BY **PETER J. WASSON**
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A former Red Cliff tribal official will face mandatory life in prison when he is sentenced in February for the 2003 slaying of a Washburn woman.

Michael LaGrew, 57, pleaded no contest and was convicted Jan. 4 in the death of Jody Richard, 50, in June 2003. She was director of the family education center in Red Cliff and taught literacy programs there. She disappeared in 2003 after not returning to work.



LaGrew

According to court records, police had been investigating the case for 17 years and arrested LaGrew, a former member of the Red Cliff Tribal Council, on March 18 of 2020.

He then confessed that he and Ricard had argued on June 27, 2003, and during the argument, he hit her in the head with a trailer jack, according to court records. He then dragged her body into the woods, hit her again in the head and hid her under a tree, records said.

Friends at the time of her death told the Daily Press that Ricard was a spirited and dedicated mother, teacher and mentor for those in her community.

Ricard's disappearance triggered a land and air search that involved hundreds of volunteer searchers who looked in vain for any trace of her.

Her body eventually was discovered in a wooded area in the town of Russell on July 8, 2003.

LaGrew was interviewed by police at when Ricard went missing and testified in a hearing about the case in 2005, but wasn't charged until he was re-interviewed by police in 2020. Police have not said what prompted them to speak with LaGrew again, 17 years later.

LaGrew will be permitted to argue that he should be eligible for supervised release when he is sentenced Feb. 17, but Ashland County Circuit Court Judge Kelly McKnight, who is presiding in the case, will determine if LaGrew will spend his life in prison.

According to court records: LaGrew phoned Ricard on June 27, 2003, and told her he wanted to meet with her at her office in the Red Cliff Even Start building. Ricard then called an acquaintance and told him she was concerned about the meeting because she "didn't trust" LaGrew.

SEE LAGREW PAGE A5

Pulling up stakes

Big Top moves HQ to Bayfield

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

Members of the Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua's Blue Canvas Orchestra have for years retreated to the confined basement of the yellow brick building in Washburn that housed the Chautauqua's administrative offices to practice for their performances.

The basement was not only cramped, it was dark and musty with lousy acoustics. A less inspiring atmosphere for making music would be hard to imagine.



Members of the Blue Canvas Orchestra will have a much more suitable rehearsal location in the new 100-seat events center that will be part of the Big Top's new headquarters. (Photo contributed by Big Top Chautauqua)

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