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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

## County could sell Phillips fairgrounds

BY **REGAN KOHLER**  
For the Review

Price County is considering selling the county fairgrounds as it searches for ways to maintain and repair the property it has owned for 130 years.

The county recently advertised that it was seeking interested parties to lease, purchase or manage the fairgrounds and received two responses: one from the Baratka family, which runs the Price County Rodeo, and the other from Lynn Ludwig of Worcester, who is working on an organization called Reimagine Price County.

County Administrator Nick Trimmer said he received estimates from several companies on upgrading and remodeling fairgrounds facilities, including the barn, arena and other buildings. He said the county also hired a real estate lawyer who found that the county was the original purchaser of the three properties around the grounds.

SEE SALE PAGE A8

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## CSD honors veterans on Nov. 11



CHAD PALZKILL/

Park Falls Elementary School fifth-grade students performed "American Tears" at the Chequamegon School District Veterans Day program Thursday, Nov. 11.



LEFT: Veterans and American Legion members stand during the Chequamegon Veterans Day ceremony last week. BELOW: The Honor Guard brings in the colors at the Park Falls Veterans Day ceremony.



## 'Like raising Lazarus from the dead'

### Local EMTs describe using Narcan on overdose patients

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

ASHLAND — Local emergency medical technicians have been administering Narcan so frequently in recent months that they can't even count the number of doses they've used.

But one emergency clearly stands out in Ashland EMT David Rekemeyer's memory. "It was at a patient's house and he had overdosed on pain meds prescribed for someone else," Rekemeyer said. "When they hit, he had his foot caught in rocks around a fire and he fell into the fire. When we administered Narcan, it was like raising Lazarus back from the dead."

As of April, the state had recorded 372 opioid-related deaths, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services,



Narcan nasal spray, like this dose held by Ashland EMT David Rekemeyer, allows victims literally to rise from the dead. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

which didn't have more recent statistics. But there's no way to measure the number of Lazaruses out there — patients who have died and been revived by cops, EMTs, first-responders or others on the growing list of people who keep Narcan handy. Rekemeyer said he and his colleagues are bringing people back from the dead just about every other week, sometimes daily.

"Yeah, it really is that bad,"

Rekemeyer said.

When a person overdoses on heroin, fentanyl or other opioids, the drugs slow down and eventually stop their breathing, Rekemeyer's partner Brian Best said.

The Narcan in wide use today doesn't even require an injection — it's a nasal spray, which gets the antidote into the bloodstream almost immediately.

SEE NARCAN PAGE A7

## Democrat Evers vetoes GOP-drawn redistricting

BY **SCOTT BAUER**  
Associated Press

MADISON — Wisconsin Democratic Gov. Tony Evers followed through Thursday on his promise to veto the Republican-drawn redistricting plans, calling the maps "gerrymandering 2.0."

The move officially shifts the fight over the once-a-decade job of drawing new political boundary lines for legislative and congressional districts to the courts. The Wisconsin Supreme Court on Wednesday laid out a schedule for hearing arguments in the case early next year.

Democrats have also filed a lawsuit in federal court, but the three-judge panel there has indicated it will wait to take action until after the case is resolved in state court.

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» VETO

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The last three times redistricting took place in Wisconsin under divided government, in 2002, 1992 and 1982, a federal court drew the maps.

Evers, who is up for reelection next year, had said he would not sign the bills that only strengthen GOP majorities under maps that Republicans enacted a decade ago.

Evers, in a video message explaining his veto, faulted the latest maps for sticking closely to the lines that have been in place for the past decade. Evers and Democrats had wanted the maps to be drawn from scratch.

"I promised I'd never sign gerrymandered maps that came to my desk, and I'm delivering on that promise today," Evers said.

Republicans do not have enough votes to override the veto without backing from Democrats. The Legislature approved the maps last week without a single Democratic vote in support.

Republican legislative leaders, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu, have not returned messages seeking comment.

Redistricting is the once-a-decade process of redrawing the state's political boundaries based on the latest census showing how populations have changed in neighborhoods, cities and counties since 2010. Mapmakers can create an advantage for their political party by packing opponents' voters into a few districts or spreading them among multiple districts — a process known as gerrymandering.

Evers created a commission that proposed its own maps. But Democrats in the Legislature were divided last week over whether to approve those. Many dissenting Democrats argued that the maps from the Evers commission would diminish African American and Latino representation in the Legislature.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court said Wednesday it would rule on key issues related to redistricting around Nov. 30. That ruling will deal with whether changes to the current GOP-friendly maps should be kept to a minimum, what factors the court should consider when choosing maps and whether partisanship should be a factor.

Democrats want the maps to be drawn from scratch, not based on the current ones enacted by Republicans in 2011.

» SALE

FROM PAGE A1

"It tells us that we were free and clear" to move forward with any plans on the grounds, Trimmer said. "As far as legal, there was no hiccups."

He noted that whether the county retains the property, leases it or sells it, keeping the fairgrounds open to the County Fair, Boy Scouts activities, 4-H and the antiques association is a priority.

The county Buildings & Grounds Committee on Nov. 16 discussed which buildings need work, which included the barn, pavilion, theater and poultry shed flooring and pig barn shingles, and the estimates.

The barn is currently off limits to public access, Trimmer said, because it is in dire need of maintenance. He found a barn restoration company that estimated it would cost \$50,000 to make it structurally sound, but the builder was only shown photos of the barn and had not seen it in person, and this seemed a low price to get the building to be structurally safe.

"I got concerned," he said. "Is this plausible for \$50,000?"

Another group estimated a full restoration and replacement could cost more than \$1 million.

"We're talking a large investment," Trimmer said.

Trimmer said the county received four estimates, the lowest \$1.125 million, which would add a wing to the barn. A \$1.1 million estimate included a show barn. A \$1.4 million estimate included two new barns and a restored center.

Committee member Bob Kopsis said he didn't feel the county could continue owning the property and allowing it to deteriorate.

"We're going to have to spend money out there," he said.

Committee Chairman Jordan Spacek said the barn has "been a part of a lot of people's lives ... it's gone by the wayside."

He said children need the fairgrounds and the county would need a five-year plan to rehab it. With a capital investment of \$1 million to \$1.5 million, the fairgrounds would still need between \$25,000 and \$45,000 in annual maintenance, he said.

Darren Baratka and his daughter Alexis Baratka outlined their plans to the committee, should they purchase the property. Darren said they would make the arena bigger and add more lighting, and the arena could host other shows beyond the rodeo.

Alexis, a former 4H Club member, said barn olympics was a big thing when she was young, and they have a vested interest in saving the barn. Their work would start with restoring the barn, grandstand and arena within the first year.

"It's one of our biggest priorities going forward," she said. "I'm able to bring back to the same place where I started what I do for a living. We want to make it better for our community."

Darren Baratka said other plans include work on the antiques building, covering the concessions stand, upgraded and additional restrooms, an events center further down the line and more.

"We'd take over the maintenance of the grounds (and) the burden off the county," Darren Baratka said.

He said he has had many offers from community members to help restore the fairgrounds and partner with his family. All investors are local, he said.

"We don't intend on bringing any outside people," he said, but they would still accept donations from outside of the county.

If the county retains ownership of the fairgrounds and leases it to the Baratkas, it would have to be a long-term lease with automatic renewal, he said. But if the county sells, the Baratkas are ready to begin work right away.

Ludwig said her nonprofit also is interested in purchasing the fairgrounds, and she felt the barn itself shouldn't be taken over by a private entity.

"Once you sell that to a private entity, that's gone," Ludwig said.

Ludwig's plan involves a survey about all Price County's municipalities to "create a collaborative network of communities that allow people to work, live, play and exchange ideas." The plan outlines goals of town hall discussions, guidelines to prevent restriction of lakefront accessibility near the fairgrounds, developing best use of the property 365 days a year, lease agreements for the physical property and a comprehensive plan. Ludwig also said she is working with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. on funding for historic preservation.

"We could easily have the Baratka family collaborate with us," Ludwig said.

Spacek asked her the name of the nonprofit.

"I do not have the nonprofit name, but I do have all the agenda," she said, adding that she would work with other local organizations on funding.

The committee plans to make a recommendation at its Dec. 7 meeting and the full County Board will consider it Dec. 14.

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