

The Chetek Alert

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Chetek, Wisconsin | One Dollar & Twenty-Five Cents

FIRST LOOK

See photos from Winter Fest 2023 in this edition

Photos abound from the area's coolest winter event. Check out the pictures on Page A7 of this edition.



St. Boniface Church providing soup luncheon for Lent

St. Boniface Catholic Church is offering homemade soup, a biscuit, crackers and a light dessert for a free will offering during Lent. Each year, the church chooses an organization to donate the monies raised. The Chetek Fire Department Dive Team will be the beneficiary of this year's monies raised, for new equipment. Beginning Wednesday, March 8, the soup will be Tomato Bisque. On Wednesday, March 15, beef stew will be served. Chilli will be served on Wednesday, March 22, and on Wednesday, March 29, the church will serve hamburger soup. The meal will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. St. Boniface is located at 419 Third Street in Chetek.

DEATHS

Lori Swenson, 66, Land O Lakes, FL
Ethel Turauski, 95, Chetek



World Champion

Brody Meskers



PHOTO COURTESY OF KYM BOND

Barefooting phenom Brody Meskers, of Chetek, made a name for himself at the 22nd annual Barefoot Water Ski World Championships in Mulwala, Australia, from Feb. 14 through Feb. 19. Athletes competed for medals in slalom, tricks, jumping and overall, in addition to the coveted team titles. Meskers earned a gold medal when he earned the top spot in the U23 Overall competition. He also earned bronze medals in the tricks, slalom and jump. The U.S. Elite Barefoot Water Ski Team tallied 6,952.63 points in earning the bronze medal. Australia won the gold (8,730.01 points), and New Zealand earned the silver (7,778.79 points) in the eight-team field. Meskers also earned a gold medal for coaching U.S. Junior Barefoot Water Ski Team which took first place. A full article of Mesker's Australian experience at the Barefoot World Championships is on Pages B1 and B2.

Winter Fest 2023: bikinis, concessions, games, 'oh my!'

BY KENTON TROUTMAN

It's a wrap for Chetek's Winter Fest 2023. Those in attendance were graced with pleasant temperatures, sunshine and loads of entertainment.

The Winter Fest pre-party was held at Red's Grill and Bar on Friday, Feb. 24, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Attendees enjoyed raffles, door prizes and music. "It was by far the best attended Fire Up party we have seen at Winter Fest," Tasha Brandemuehl, the Bikini Run



KENTON TROUTMAN | THE CHETEK ALERT

Pictured above is Tasha Brandemuehl, Bikini Run organizer, and Rob Licht hanging on for dear life at the Winter Fest 2023 Bikini Run.

SEE BIKINI, PAGE A7

City applying for loan to fund water tower project

BY KENTON TROUTMAN

The Chetek City Council voted to move forward with its application for the DNR Safe Drinking Water Loan program to financially assist in updating a crucial portion of the city's infrastructure—the city's water tower.

Jana Nyhagen and Brea Grace, representatives from SEH Inc., presented their findings for the proposed water tower and well project. The representatives offered the council two paths to move forward and the costs associated with each decision.

BANDAID SOLUTION

If the city decided to enter into triage mode—focusing on minimal maintenance to keep the standpipe in operation—the city would have up to two years before it would be required. According to Nyhagen, an inspection of the water tower/standpipe was conducted in 2020, and there were recommendations for repairs.

The current standpipe requires minor repairs in the next one to two years which will cost approximately \$180,000 with an additional cost of at least \$36,000 if the city chooses to have a mixer (responsible for circulating water) installed to the current water tower. One of the struggles with the current standpipe is drainage: "It's hard to drain the current standpipe because there isn't a hydrant up near the structure," Nyhagen explained.

Public Works Director, Dan Knapp said he would like to see the installation of a hydrant to the current structure if the council were to table the new water tower project. The purpose of the hydrant and valve would isolate the standpipe, so it could be drained. The cost of implementing this equipment would be approximately \$37,000.

Meeting maintenance requirements would provide the city with between eight and ten years before the city would have to consider a full reconditioning at an estimated cost of \$550,000 to \$600,000. Nyhagen noted the probable rise in cost for continued maintenance after the city reconditions the standpipe, "In eight to ten

SEE TOWER, PAGE A7

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TOWER: The cost of the water tower project in February of 2021 nearly half the cost of the updated estimate of \$3.5 million

FROM PAGE A1

years from that point, your guess is as good as mine on how much it will cost."

Council members began adding the figures and settled on a figure of around \$1,000,000 if the city were to go the maintenance route with the current standpipe.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

If the city chose to move forward with the new water tower project, the current cost would be \$3,498,700. The city would then have 40 years to use the new water tower before considering updates. "I feel like this is a no-brainer, but my hesitation comes with the wastewater treatment plant project and our current sewer rate increase," council member Thea Hempel noted.

The City of Chetek weighed the possibility of applying for the DNR's Safe Water

Drinking Loan. Grace, a Community Planner for SEH explained the loan process to the council. She said the loan would be submitted by June 30, 2023. The DNR would make its determination in December or January of 2024. Grace noted the loan could be either a 20-year or a 30-year loan, with a slight increase in interest rate if they agreed to a 30-year loan agreement.

City Treasurer Carmen Newman said the city would analyze what its debt would be without the Safe Water Drinking Loan financing and what water and sewer rates would be if the city is awarded the financing.

Grace shared her optimism with the council about the DNR's loan program, "The Safe Drinking Water Loan is a good option for you because it has unprecedented funds."

Council members discussed their concerns

about the cost of the project on the heels of the wastewater treatment plant project, "Communities all over the country are in an infrastructure jam, just like us because of the timeframe of infrastructure builds across the country," Hempel concluded.

Grover noted the impact of the new standpipe to the city, "I think a major impact would be the water that must run continuously during the winter months where thousands and thousands of gallons of water are wasted. Grace agreed with Grover that it is costly to the city to continue wasting water.

Loss of water pressure is another reason why updating the standpipe would be in the city's best interest, according to the SEH representatives.

There are homes situated near well number

two that have a level of 35 PSI which the DNR is currently referring to as an existing deficiency, according to Nyhagen.

Council members also noted the water pressure deficiency is an obstacle the Knapp St. Housing Development has faced.

In February 2021, the estimated cost of the water tower project was \$1.3 to 1.7 million.

Council members noted that infrastructure improvements have been discussed over the years but were put on the back burner, "If we keep kicking the can down the road, it's only going to become more expensive," Grover noted.

The Chetek City Council will meet on Thursday, March 2, with S.C. Swiderski and MSA engineering to discuss the proposed water tower for the Knapp St. Housing Development.

One liberal, one conservative emerge from Supreme Court primary

One liberal and one conservative candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court emerged from a primary of four candidates on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

As of press time late Tuesday night, Janet Protasiewicz, considered a liberal-leaning judge currently serving in Milwaukee County, received about 46.5 percent of the statewide vote.

The two judges considered conservative-leaning, former Wisconsin Justice Daniel Kelly and Waukesha County Judge Jennifer Dorow, were deadlocked for much of the evening. But Kelly was eventually pulled away into the second place spot with about 24.2 percent of the vote to 21.9 percent for Dorow.

Another candidate favored by liberals, Dane County Judge Everett Mitchell, was a distant fourth place with about 7.5 percent of the vote.

With major issues at the forefront like abortion and gerrymandering, the outcome of the April 4 election could swing the court's 4-3 conservative majority.

Dorow had strong support in southeastern Wisconsin, while Kelly had more outstate support, including in Barron County. Vote totals in Barron County were 2,493 for Kelly; 1,973 for Protasiewicz; 534 for Dorow; and 285 for Mitchell.

In the City of Chetek, vote totals were 98 for Kelly, 83 for Protasiewicz, 34 for Dorow and 12 for Mitchell.

Looking ahead to the Spring Election, absentee ballots must be mailed out by clerks by March 14.

Early in-person voting is available between March 21 and April 2. Voters should check with their local clerk for further information.

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, April 4.

BIKINI: Bikini runners raised over \$4,000 for Pink Ribbon Advocacy of Barron County

FROM PAGE A1

Coordinator concluded.

The event was held at Pokegama Lakeside Cantina on Saturday, Feb. 25, starting at 10 a.m. with Kids Ice Pro Racing.

The kids had a blast racing around an oval track as spectators milled about between Gilligans and the Cantina.

There were several kids games at the event including a kid-sized hockey rink for players to face off in friendly competition.

With the unexpected weather patterns this year, the Chetek Chamber dealt with many last-minute decisions, while planning the area's most popular winter event.

"We were so disappointed when the NSSR said they wouldn't be able to come this year because of the ice conditions on the lake, but we made the most of it and made sure to have a backup plan," noted Blatz.

The event was free to attend, and people found parking on a first-come-first-serve basis at Lakeside Cantina, a nearby park, Gilligans, the lake, and just about anywhere deemed legal.

Food and refreshments were never out of reach for attendees as The Chetek Chamber of Commerce offered concessions for the duration of the festival. Jennifer Blatz, one of the Chetek Chamber's event coordinators, said the chamber was impressed with concession sales considering the proximity to two of Chetek's popular restaurants, "People were really generous and made sure to purchase concessions even though there were other options because of our location this year."

Like a can of sardines, attendees were packed inside the Cantina to warm up and grab refreshments.

There were several adult games that debuted this year, including curling with a Wisconsin twist—a frozen chicken instead of a stone.

It was all fun and games while people awaited the event's most popular feature—the Bikini Run.

Eight runners—six women and two brave men—sauntered out onto the ice after removing their parkas and gloves for a group photo before the race. Two racers tied

for first place in the event. Lisa Heidemann (Red's Bar and Grill) and Chetek local Brianna Saffert, raced across the 500-foot track at 77 mph—nearly breaking the Bikini Run speed record of 79 mph.

Robert Licht, a Winter Fest event organizer, was a Bikini Run newbie this year and introduced the event in shorts and a pink sash draped across his torso.

Some may remember Brandemuehl and Licht were featured on "Hello Wisconsin" to announce the 2022 event. At the end of the segment, Licht took off on a snowmobile with Brandemuehl on the back. She bounced off the snowmobile and into the snow.

The video clip made its rounds on social media before the event, and Brandemuehl decided it was her turn. "Who wants to see me throw Rob off the back of the snowmobile," Brandemuehl asked the crowd. The crowd cheered in support of the proposition, and Licht reluctantly mounted the snow machine with Brandemuehl. She was not successful, but she did give Licht a run for his money.

An exact total of funds raised from the Bikini Run event was not available at the time of publication, but Brandemuehl said in her estimation, over \$4,000 was raised for Pink Ribbon Advocacy of Barron County.

The overall attendance at the event is unknown by organizers as there were no checkpoints to document attendees as they came and went; however, many believe nearly 2,000 were in attendance.

The awards banquet was held at Lakeside Cantina at 6 p.m. where remaining raffle prizes and Kids Ice Pro Winners were announced. The names of the Kids Ice Pro Racing winners were not yet available at the time of publication.

The Chamber of Commerce is breathing a sigh of relief as the planning and coordinating of this large event has come to a close. Blatz said they appreciate everything the community did to help this event come together, "We couldn't have done this event if it weren't for our amazing sponsors and volunteers who helped us navigate through all of the uncertainties to make this event a success," Blatz concluded.



KENTON TROUTMAN | THE CHETEK ALERT

The 2023 Bikini Run was a nail-biter as two racers tied for first place. Lisa Heidemann pictured above in the blue bikini (third from the right), and Brianna Saffert pictured above in the maroon bikini top (fourth from the left), both raced down the 500 foot track at 77 mph. The crowd was energetic as ever and one unknown spectator photobombed the Bikini Run group photo as seen above in the background. Pictured at right are racers from the Kids Ice Pro Racing circuit. The event drew a crowd of curious onlookers as the young competitors raced around an oval track on Saturday, Feb. 25. Kids games were a hit this year and included a kid-sized hockey rink near the shore of Lakeside Cantina as pictured below at right. Spectators young and old gathered at the race track's edge as the Bikini Run was announced. Pictured below are a few of those spectators with the best seats in the house, making snowballs while they watched the runners zoom down the track.



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