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## Karma buries MN car thief in pile of deep manure

*Man attempts to flee Prescott police*

By Sarah Nigbor

**TOWN OF OAK GROVE** – A St. Paul man fleeing police may have regretted his decision to drive through a cornfield when he buried a stolen car deep into a large manure pile on Nov. 6 in the town of Oak Grove.

Pierce County Circuit Court Judge Elizabeth Rohl ordered Nathanael Wondwossen Ashenafi, 30, to pay \$1,000 cash bail Nov. 9 on felony attempting to flee or elude an officer, felony drive or operate vehicle without consent, resisting or obstructing an officer and possession of THC. If convicted, Ashenafi faces up to 3.5 years in prison and/or fines up to \$10,000.

According to the complaint:

At 1:40 a.m. (Daylight



Nathanael Ashenafi

Savings Time), Pierce County Dispatch notified Prescott police that a man fleeing Washington County (Minn.) police in a stolen vehicle may be headed toward Prescott on Highway 10. He was suspected to have a firearm, a hatchet and a bottle of whiskey in the car. A Prescott officer parked at Holiday (236 Broad St.) and soon thereafter, the stolen black Volkswagen sedan headed into Prescott and turned to head

south on Highway 35. The vehicle had no license plates and had one occupant inside.

The officer attempted to pull the vehicle over in the 100 block of Broad Street, but the driver turned off the VW's headlights and tail lights and began speeding. The officer called for backup and followed in pursuit. The driver threw random objects from the driver's side window as he sped down the highway. At times he'd slow down below the speed limit and frequently operated in the opposite traffic lane, all with no lights on.

A Pierce County deputy was prepared to deploy spike strips near County Road E, but the vehicle turned right onto 1050<sup>th</sup> Street before reaching the location.

**See MANURE CRASH, Page 10**

## City ready to fight for trail from downtown to Freedom Park

*DOT plans sidewalk on route*

By John McLoone

**PRESCOTT** – The Wisconsin Department of Transportation doesn't have a multi-use trail from downtown to Freedom Park in plans for the 2026/2027 Highways 10 and 35 road construction project in Prescott.

Instead, the DOT wants to install a six-foot sidewalk that would butt right up to the curb of the road.

That's a non-starter for Prescott's point of view. The city also has other concerns with a proposed maintenance plan that would require Prescott to do future fixes on

the roadway at city expense.

As a result, the city council's Public Works Committee is going to invite DOT officials to a meeting to see if any common ground can be found.

The council discussed the major future road project at its meeting Monday, Nov. 14, and alderpersons learned that the project would be pushed back if an agreement can't be reached on a maintenance agreement.

The DOT has proposed putting in the sidewalk, rather than the trail, with the city picking up 20 percent of the

**See FREEDOM PARK, Page 10**



Bay City American Legion Adjutant and retired Army Reserve combat veteran Devin Feuerhelm (left) received a Purple Heart from U.S. Rep. Ron Kind Friday, Nov. 11 at Ellsworth Middle School's Veterans Day ceremony. Photo by Sarah Nigbor

## Feuerhelm awarded Purple Heart on Veterans Day

By Sarah Nigbor

**ELLSWORTH** – It was a day Army Reserve combat veteran Devin Feuerhelm thought would never come, but came it did. On Friday, Nov. 11 in front of a packed house, U.S. Rep. Ron Kind awarded him a Purple Heart at the Ellsworth Middle School Veterans Day ceremony.

As EMS Principal Olin Morrison quoted Eleanor Roosevelt, "Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human. With freedom comes responsibility."

Morrison directed his opening remarks to the students gathered there, imploring them to look for the little things on Veterans Day and

**See VET DAY, Page 9**



Elmwood High School students at La Milpa Archaeological research site in western Belize. Photo courtesy of Kristel Boyer

## Elmwood students recount once-in-a-lifetime trip to Belize

By Sarah Nigbor

**ELMWOOD** – Twelve students, 12 days, and countless memories. The perfect description for Elmwood High School students' trip to Belize this past summer.

Elmwood School District science teacher Kristel Boyer led the students, including Rylee Hartung, Aaden Birtzer, Seth Loga, Britta Link, Ryan Rupakus, Lily Webb, Hailey Webb, Blake Allen, Jackson Neubauer, Brooke Schwebach, Luisa Eng and Riley Ginsbach on a 12-day research expedition to Belize. This was her largest group to date.

In 2018, Boyer took a student to the Amazon to study insects through Jason Learning, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing curriculum and learning experiences in science, technology, engineering and math for K-12 students. After presenting at a sci-

ence teachers' conference in Washington DC, a representative from Jason Learning had offered her that opportunity. In 2019, she led another student on a research trip to the Bahamas to study sea turtles with marine biologists.

With two trips under her belt, Boyer felt she could lead a trip on her own. She presented the Belize trip idea to the Elmwood School Board, who was supportive. Once given the greenlight, Boyer planned the trip to Belize with Save the Rainforests.

"My biggest goal was to take the kids out of their comfort zone, see a world they've never seen before," Boyer said. "It was just great to get the kids to go to another country and have these experiences. Camping, snorkeling, the ultimate adventure. I think it's

**See BELIZE, Page 10**

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**HOME AUTO BOAT ATV SNOWMOBILES BUSINESS WORKERS COMP**





Elmwood students donated school supplies to a Belizean school in July. Although school wasn't in session at the time, the principal sent a thank you picture later. Photo courtesy of Kristel Boyer



Studying sea life at Glover's Reef off the coast of Belize was a highlight for Elmwood science students this past July. Photo courtesy of Kristel Boyer

## Belize

from Page 1

something they're really going to remember their whole lives."

The adventurers raised money for their trip, which cost \$2,800 per person, for a couple of years. Two students had never been on a plane before. When the time came, they boarded a plane for Dallas, and from there flew to Belize where they met their tour guides, Marcos and Mauricio. They rode a bus for three hours deep into the rainforest of Belize's western side, close to the Guatemalan border.

When they arrived at La Milpa Research Station, they were definitely out of their comfort zones. The group stayed in thatched huts with no electricity where cockroaches scuttled across the floors, scorpions dangled from the ceiling thatch and lizards meandered through at night. They slept in mosquito nets.

"Naked and Afraid," a survivalist reality show on the Discovery Channel, filmed a season not far from La Milpa. The University of Texas also conducts research there, Boyer said.

The next day, students began their research projects which ranged from studying hummingbird and fire ant behavior to the efficacy of the Twelve 'O Clock plant in treating sleeping disorders.

The students also visited Mayan ruins such as Lamanai, swam off a dam on the Rio Bravo, donated school supplies to a local school, took dance lessons, sampled authentic food and took night hikes. They drank out of vines in the rainforest, learned how to eat a coconut and witnessed scorpions glowing under black lights. Howler monkeys even made their appearance, a treat for the group.

"The Howler monkeys that we saw sounded like monsters," Hartung said. "They use Howler monkey sounds in Jurassic Park."

And while Hartung also loved the authentic food, which included a lot of chicken and root vegetables, Allen learned to appreciate what he has back home.

"I learned not to take stuff for granted that we have here, like air conditioning, toilets, good schooling," he said.

Lily Webb laughed as she told how she and her sister, Hailey Webb, got trapped in an outhouse in the wee hours on a very hot and humid day. Loga recounted how he and Rupakus learned that Neubauer was a scorpion slayer.

"Me, Ryan and Jackson shared a thatch hut and we just came back from our night hike," Loga said. "We were getting ready for bed and we were about to lay down and all of a sudden we hear Jackson slashing something

up in his loft. He said, 'I killed a scorpion that was hanging above my bed.'"

"You could hear the screaming from many huts away," Boyer chimed in.

Schwabach worked on becoming more open-minded by facing her fear of spiders.

"I hate spiders and when they asked 'Does anyone want to hold this tarantula,' I said 'Sure, why not,'" she said.

The fuzzy spider crawled all over her as she stood frozen in place, but she faced her fear.

The second half of the trip, the group headed east to Glover's Reef Wildlife Conservation Society, an island about 40 miles off the coast. The island contained no stores nor people living there.

"It was two very different worlds," Boyer said of the island and rainforest. "Which was one of the reasons we leaned toward this trip."

The students had to pick research projects on the island as well. One group studied the eating habits of shallow ocean animals, while others studied fish, hermit crabs, blue crabs and pelicans.

The highlight of the trip for many students was snorkeling off the reef, sometimes with jellyfish, other times with sharks.

"A shark swam between me and my sister," Hailey Webb said. "I thought it was cool after I realized it wasn't a shark that bites. Nurse sharks are not aggressive."

Another research group was "chumming the water" off the dock in an attempt to lure tiger sharks in. Loga jumped in the water with the chum and got "some great GoPro footage."

"I really liked the upside-down jellyfish that we snorkeled above, even though it was really scary," Link said.

"This was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Lily Webb said. "This is how I will remember my high school years, since most of them were shut down by COVID."

The kids even saved a sea turtle, not something that happens in Wisconsin. Neubauer found the flipped over turtle while exploring behind their island huts.

"It was so big I couldn't pick it up," he said. "I thought it might be dead, but it wasn't. It just flipped over on its back and stuck."

The kids dumped water on it with buckets until two fishery officers docked and cleared a path to the water for the turtle, which they flipped over.

In 2024, Boyer will lead students from Plum City School District to South Africa to study rhinoceroses. The next Elmwood trip will take place in 2026, destination unknown.

Loga has been inspired by his experience and found out something about himself.

"I'm going back to the ocean someday," he said. "It's my home."

## Manure crash

from Page 1

The officer pursued Ashenafi down 1050<sup>th</sup> Street, which turned into 1080<sup>th</sup> Street. Near 4201 1080<sup>th</sup> St., Ashenafi drove into a cornfield and attempted to lose police that way, but officers blocked his escape back onto Highway 35. As he navigated the tree line and tried to turn around, he crashed the vehicle into a big manure pile. Ashenafi tried to get out of the vehicle through the driver's door, but he was in such deep manure that he couldn't open it. He escaped through the passenger side window and fled on foot. He tried to hide from officers in tall grass, but the spotlight kept him in sight until two officers took him into custody. A St. Croix County K9 officer responded

to help police search for the items Ashenafi had flung on his flight through the countryside. Officers suspected he had thrown narcotics from the vehicle, since the K9 indicated their presence, but only found a bouquet of flowers, a pair of blue shorts, a pair of white boxer shorts and later, a box cutter. A firearm or hatchet was never found, but 2.5 grams of marijuana was.

Police learned the vehicle had been stolen from a New Hope, Minn., gym while the owner was there working out. The vehicle's keys and the owner's wallet and cell phone were taken from a locker at the gym. The vehicle was towed to the county impound lot and Ashenafi was transported to Pierce County Jail.

He was scheduled for a preliminary hearing in Pierce County Circuit Court at 4 p.m. Nov. 14.

## Plum City November Students of the Month



Congratulations to Ambrose Malles and Grace Hinrichs for being selected as Plum City High School's Students of the Month for November and Caleb Keith and Hannah Bechel, who are Plum City Middle School's Students of the Month. They are pictured with Superintendent Brian Nadeau and Dean of Students Angie Laehn. Photos courtesy of Plum City School District

## Freedom Park

from Page 1

cost. If the city wants the 10-foot-wide multi-use trail built four feet in from the edge of the road, City Administrator Matt Wolf said the city would have to contribute \$1.348 million to the project.

"What they're saying is the sidewalk would be good enough," Wolf said.

The DOT also plans four-foot bike lanes along the side of Highway 35. The city feels the road could be narrowed, which would help slow traffic in the 25 mph zone, and that would give plenty of room for the trail. However, the DOT responded that the curb and gutter along the route aren't being replaced, because they consider them still to be in good condition.

The city's stance is that if they're forced to maintain aspects of the project, they should have a say in what's built.

"We've been pushing back. If we're maintaining it, we want it to be built in the way that's most useful for us. That's one of the reasons we've been pushing for that trail from downtown," said Wolf.

The city could apply for transportation grant funding to help pay for the trail. However, Wolf said the city already plans to apply for that grant to get a walkway developed under Highway 29 so residents can walk to the Eagle Ridge Business Park area.

"We keep pushing back on this, and we don't seem to be getting anywhere," said Alderperson Bailey Ruona.

The city will also be asked to pick up future maintenance of curb and gutter along the route, retaining walls from downtown to Freedom Park and some storm sewer, Wolf said.

Council members were concerned because they aren't having any say in materials used or the construction process but have to pay to fix things in the future.

Alderperson Pat Knox said that the state talks about keeping taxes low but passes these things on to communities like Prescott.

"They're pushing expenses up the highway from Madison onto us. It's a shell game," he said.

Mayor Robert Daugherty commented, "Basically, they're giving us the used car and asking us to maintain it like a new car."

"With an oil leak," Ruona added.

"I really think we have to have the multi-use trail, one way or another," said Alderperson Maureen Otwell. "We've talked about having a trail from downtown to Freedom Park for a long time."

Alderperson Thomas Oss said, "It's worth getting scrappy about."

Wolf will work out a date for a joint meeting.

### Water rate study

The city applied for a simplified water rate increase of 4.5 percent with the state Public Service Commission.

The city has some big projects looming, with one well offline because of nitrate problems and some road rebuilds in planning. The council voted unanimously to have the consulting firm Ehlers Public Finance Advisors do a phase 1 rate study.

Wolf told the council that water infrastructure improvements and bringing the well back online could put the city near its debt capacity for its water utility.

He said as part of the plan, the city will give Ehlers a list of capital projects planned in the next decade, and they'll tell the city where their water rate needs to be.

"They'll do an analysis of what kind of rate increase we might be facing if we were to bring it to the PSC," Wolf said. "It doesn't mean we're bringing it to the PSC. They're doing an analysis, and they'll bring it to the council for review."

Prior to sending the info to the PSC, the council would review the plan and approve it.

### New committees

Unanimous approval was given to a new committee structure that consolidates the seven current council committees down to four. The new standing committees and their makeup will be:

- Finance – Made up of the mayor and full council.
- Parks and Public Works – Made up of three alderpersons.
- Health and Safety – Made up of three alderpersons.
- Personnel – Made up of three alderpersons.

The council has held discussions at several previous meetings, and it was stated that some committees view the same topics and others aren't necessary due to Wisconsin State statutes.

### Spring election

Two city council seats are up for re-election, and there will be at least one new member on the city council.

Thomas Oss is up for re-election in Ward 3, and Darlyn Hintz is up for re-election in Ward 4. However, because of city redistricting, Oss now lives in the second ward, and Hintz lives in the third ward.

"I cannot run again in the third ward. I'm in the second ward now," Oss said.

Hintz indicated she will seek re-election, though.

Terms of office are three years. Anyone interested can declare candidacy at the city clerk office and start circulating nomination papers as of Dec. 1. They need to be returned by Tuesday, Jan. 3.

## Zimmerman Justice joins RF Chamber



Zimmerman Justice recently held a ribbon cutting at River Falls City Hall (222 Lewis St.) to celebrate joining the River Falls Area Chamber of Commerce. Zimmerman Justice is western Wisconsin's newest law firm. They focus on OWI/DUI and traffic law, criminal defense ranging from misdemeanors to all felony level cases, as well as restraining orders and injunctions. Learn more by calling 715-425-7100 or visit zimmermanjustice.com They are located at 625 Whitetail Blvd., River Falls. Photo courtesy of RF Area Chamber of Commerce