



Volunteers replace dugouts. **A3**



Prentice volleyball dominates. **B1**

PRICE COUNTY REVIEW

S3

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Weidman appointed Park Falls alderwoman

BY TOM LAVENTURE
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PARK FALLS — Dixie Weidman will serve as the interim third district alder for the city of Park Falls Common Council.

Park Falls Mayor Michael Bablick appointed Weidman alderwoman at the Sept. 12 Committee of the Whole meeting.

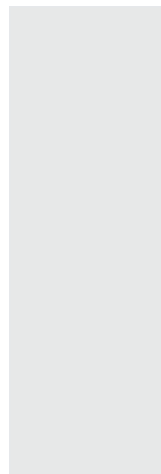
The seat was vacated by the late Alderman David Dryer, who died on Aug. 11 at Marshfield Medical Center in Weston.

Mayor Bablick said it was clear early on who he thought should fulfill Dryer's term.

"Dixie has been coming to virtually every meeting for several months, only because she wanted to know what was going on, as a conscientious citizen," Bablick said. "I believe she will do a great job for the residents she now represents. She pays attention to details, is caring, and has a high intellect."

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For the love of football

Lexi Harris is first girl to play varsity football at Chequamegon

BY TOM LAVENTURE
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PARK FALLS — The Chequamegon/Butternut/Mercer varsity football team is struggling this season but one highlight so far is Lexi Harris, the first girl to ever play varsity football for the school.

Harris is a 17-year-old senior who has been playing football since middle school and is now wearing number 81 for the varsity team where she plays on offense and defense as a guard, receiver and other positions when needed. The difference between middle school and junior varsity from varsity is the speed and intensity of the game, she said.

"Middle school was a lot more calm and slowed down and JV is kind of the same," Harris said. "Varsity is very high paced, very fast. There are a lot harder hits but it's pretty fun."

Playing as lineman is inviting the most physical contact of the game. As a competitor the physicality is what she likes most about football and with that the kind of team bonding that only comes from the emotional intensity of football.

"I've found a sense of family on the football team that I haven't been able to find on a team anywhere else," Harris said. "That's one of the reasons I always come back."

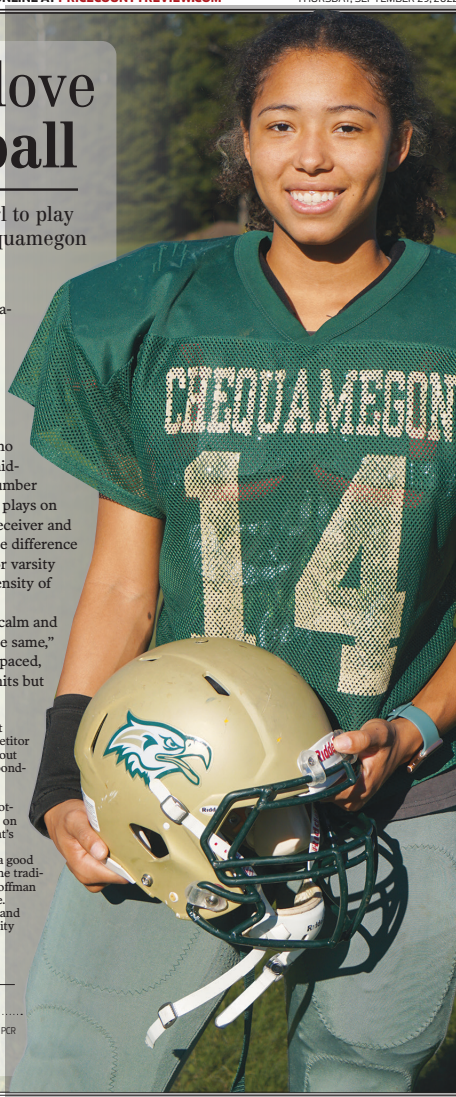
Head football coach Dan Pearsall has a good sense of humor, she said. There is also the tradition of bringing assistant coach Chris Hoffman some Skittles before every football game.

Harris is the daughter of Kim Kaleka and Thomas Harris. Her brother played varsity quarterback for three years before graduating in 2019 and is now attending UW Oshkosh.

SEE HARRIS • PAGE A8

TOM LAVENTURE / PER

Lexi Harris suits up for varsity football practice at Chequamegon High School.



Omaha Road to be paved

BY TOM LAVENTURE
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PHILLIPS — The Price County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to support the county portion of a town of Lake road paving project at the Sept. 13 meeting.

The Forestry and Parks and Executive Committee resolution will fund the county portion of paving Omaha Road in the area of Smith Lake County Park in the town of Lake. The total estimated county cost is approximately less than \$40,000 of the total \$400,000 to \$5,000 project of the town of Lake, according to meeting discussion.

SEE OMAHA • PAGE A9

Court sides with Sleck in open records case

BY TOM LAVENTURE
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WORCESTER — A judge has ruled against the town of Worcester in a two-year-old Open Records Law case brought by a resident who requested to review public items between March and August of 2020.

In a written decision filed on Sept. 20, Taylor County Judge Ann Knox-Bauer, who was assigned after Price County Judge Kevin Klein recused himself from the case, ruled that the town of Worcester had violated Open Records Law in three instances. The town failed to provide copies of town road crew job applications that were not determined to be confidential information, failed to perform an adequate search for

records that were said to be in the possession of former town officials, and then for charging excessive fees for making copies.

"Town officials are servants of the community they represent," said the petitioner, Anthony Sleck. "As a taxpayer, I expect my representatives to be truthful and transparent with all they do. This lawsuit has always been about making sure they are accountable to the public."

The town of Worcester referred requests to comment to their attorneys. No response was received prior to the newspaper deadline.

Slack filed suit in October 2020 through the Wisconsin Transparency Project in Port Washington.

SEE SLECK • PAGE A9

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» SLECK
FROM PAGE A1

Project attorney Thomas Claire Kamenick represented Sleck in alleging 11 violations of Open Records Law.

Some claims were resolved after the suit was filed but the case continued when the town failed to respond to discovery requests in a timely manner, according to Kamenick's response to the judge's order. This resulted in sanctions against the town including an order for the town to pay \$3,163 in attorney's fees for Sleck at a Feb. 21 hearing.

"The bottom line here is that I had to pay to hire an attorney just to get access to Open Public Records. This in itself is the issue," Sleck said. "I had to put my money out to get access. Then the township had to use taxpayer money for their defense. Why? It's a simple answer. They didn't know what they were doing."

In its final ruling the court said the former Worcester officials violated the law when they denied Sleck's request to review what he said were 10 job applications from job postings for road workers. The town clerk was non-responsible and then charged more than actuarial costs for copies. The records were provided to Sleck the following month, but not all that he requested was made available.

The town interviewed three applicants before hiring the son-in-law of a friend of a board member, according to the suit. A separate road worker posting the following summer resulted in five applications and Sleck was told the applicants signed waivers that they did not want their private information shared with the public.

Sleck learned from an interim town chair that the applications were shredded except for the person who was hired. A



Sleck and wife Dena out west when he was an over the road driver for Millis Transfer. The couple say they are hoping that a recent judgment in a lawsuit against the town of Worcester in his favor will help quash the community sentiment that he was a troublemaker.

request to review town equipment maintenance logs had no response, and requests to review special board meeting agendas and minutes from 2020 were not made available.

During the period of the lawsuit the town changed its records review policy twice, and claimed some documents were with former town chair Dan Cummings. Former town chair Jim Heizler claimed that the applications were confidential but the court ruled that was illegal.

The court also found that former town clerk Sheila Hook failed to perform an adequate search for the applications, never looking for them herself, assuming Cummings had them, but never verified that either, Kamenick stated in his response.

"The court is requiring the town to perform a thorough

search for those applications and turn over any responsive records it locates," he said. The court ruled that former town officials violated the law by denying a request for a separate set of road crew job applications. In this later instance the town determined the applications were confidential after asking applicants to request in writing their applications not be provided so as to deny review requests under statutory exemption.

The court rejected that argument, ruling that at the time the request was made, no exemption applied, so the Town was required to produce the applications.

Sleck explained that denial was illegal, which was affirmed by the court. The court also ruled that the town violated open records law when it increased the cost

per copy from the cost of producing copies to 50 cents per page as excessive. The court concluded that the town's "actual, necessary and direct cost" of making copies, having relied only on town supervisor Paul Precour's "supposition, estimate and experience working in the private sector."

"This is an important ruling for requesters and custodians around the state," Kamenick said. "While it doesn't have precedential effect, it indicates that judges will not permit government authorities to exaggerate their costs for supplies or pad those calculations with costs that aren't directly related to photocopying documents for a request. Things like insurance, maintenance, and buying computer equipment are not actual, necessary and direct costs" of making copies.

AN EMOTIONAL AND COMMUNITY TOLL

It is a bittersweet victory, according to Sleck. The ordeal has vilified him in the eyes of the community as a "troublemaker." Community members have shouted him down in meetings and accused him of being out for revenge.

Sleck said he and his wife of 18 years, Dena Sleck, have law enforcement monitoring their social media accounts due to verbal attacks that they fear will escalate. The fear is the result of a few individuals who get otherwise good people to think and act on misinformation, he said.

"It's my right as a citizen to ask questions and get answers," Sleck said. "It has taken over two years to do this and I hope that other citizens start asking why and how their tax dollars are being spent. It is their right to know. Don't wait until you get your tax bill. By then it's too late. Take more interest in the workings of the township. Attend meetings that are held. And most of all, don't be afraid to ask questions. They represent you. They need to answer to you. Don't back down and stop searching for the answers. They are there if you put in an effort to find them."

It's all part of the duty but no one wants to be held accountable, he said. When someone starts to question things, everybody wants to point fingers and blame anyone but themselves.

"It is an honor to serve and represent a community, he said. "If the town board members don't want to be transparent, there has to be a reason why," Sleck said. "And it's my own quest as a taxpayer in this community to get the answers."

» OMAHA
FROM PAGE A1

The county assisted the town of Lake with the grant application to the state Department of Transportation, said Price County Administrator Nicholas Trimmer. The project is to pave a gravel road through the town of Lake that leads into a county park to the boat landing.

"I think it's been acknowledged that our greatest asset or one that is really high is our park system," said Price County Board Chair Alan Barkstrom in support of improving the road. "This attracts people to come to the area."

The board approved a resolution to dedicate the County Highway YY Bridge in memory of the late former Price County Board Member and Highway and Transportation Committee member Ron Heikkinen. The late board member was credited with working to complete the bridge project for more than a decade in partnership with Lincoln County, which borders the bridge.

"I was a good acquaintance of Ron Heikkinen and his wife," Barkstrom said. "He was a good person who served on the board for many years."

Now that the resolution is approved, the attention can turn to producing a plaque, according to board members, he said. The committee will also work to schedule an event at some point in time that will allow for board members, Heikkinen's family and community to be present for a ceremony at the bridge.

The board approved a resolution to identify one Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for Price County. This is a prerequisite to applying for PSAP grants for 911 communication center equipment and training.

"In order to apply for anything, you have to designate one 911 center per county," Trimmer said. "We only have one but some counties with larger cities have multiple 911 communication centers."

The Price County emergency communications center was last updated three years ago and the next digital equipment update is due by 2027, he said. The system is already in need of upgrades and the resolution helps clear the way for reimbursement for costs already incurred.

The enhancements include technology that links physicians to EMTs on the scene, he said. There is improved mapping for units on the road and video.

In other business the board approved two resolutions related to short term borrowing to finance capital projects and highway department road construction projects through 2023. The annual resolution

started in 2018 to provide funding for paving roads that would otherwise be unavailable to keep the county up to date on road maintenance. "At a state level we are way below the average county for the amount

of debt we take per year, or debt payments, and we pay it all off yearly," Trimmer said. "...So we are well within the bounds of what we're allowed to do and we're significantly lower than most counties."

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