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The Humble Horse is home to seven Ojibwe horses like this one, who are curious, sweet and playful. There are only 180 of them left in the world, but the number is slowly growing. Photo by Sarah Nigbor

Local nonprofit aims to save rare Ojibwe horse

Goal is to reconnect with horse ancestors

By Sarah Nigbor

TOWN OF GILMAN – For Em Loerzel, the Lac La Croix Indian ponies she's caring for aren't just animals or tools: They are her family members, family to the entire Ojibwe nation. And when she adopted six of the remaining 180 left in the world, it was like being reunited with long-lost relatives.

"In my early 20s, one of my uncles would tell stories about how when he was a kid, there were small horses who would live in the woods," Loerzel said. "One day they all disappeared."

In the 1970s, the Canadian and United State governments collected the remaining

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Prescott using complaint process for code enforcement

By John McLoone

PRESCOTT – One Prescott resident has made most of the complaints that drive the city's property code enforcement.

City Planner Carter Hayes gave a presentation to the city council on the enforcement at its meeting Monday, Oct. 10. The city's property code enforcement is purely complaint driven, he said.

Upon receipt of a complaint, Hayes will look at the property and verify the problem.

"I'll go out to the site myself and verify if it exists. If it does, I'll send out a letter of violation," he said.

That letter either gives the property owner 30 days to clear up the problem if it's something like junk removal or 10 days for something like long grass or weeds.

If 30 days pass, and the violation still exists, the property owner is cited and a court date is set.

"After 30 days, I'll go out to the site and check to see if the violation is still present.

If it is, we'll issue a citation. If it's not, the violation is resolved, and that's the best-case scenario," said Hayes, who coordinates issuance of the citation with the police department.

If the matter goes to municipal court, the property owner can plead guilty, not guilty or no contest. If they're found guilty, the city will send out a letter demanding the property violation be taken care of. The property owner then has the right to either take care of the problem or ask for a hearing before the city plan commission. If no remedial action is taken, the city cleans up the property and bills the property owner.

He used an Elm Street property as an example. A letter was sent because of a May 19 complaint about junked vehicles at the site. A citation was issued in early July. The property owner didn't show up for court and pled no contest and paid the fine. The property still wasn't

See CODE Page 8

Picketing, election official ordinances on the horizon

Resident pleads for more proactive policing

By Sarah Nigbor

RIVER FALLS – The River Falls City Council heard first readings of two ordinances Tuesday, Oct. 11 to do with residential picketing regulations and disorderly conduct related to election workers.

Staff noted in the council packet that they are not aware of any reported instances of targeted residential picketing within the city, but other cities have experienced it due to events, policies or judicial decisions.

Nationwide, election officials have been the target of increased threats, harassments and intimidation, including in Wisconsin. The League of Wisconsin Municipalities has partnered with the Wisconsin Counties Association and the Wisconsin Towns Association to pro-

duce a public relations video that is geared toward reducing the likelihood that such behavior will occur. Again, staff is not aware of any specific instances of election official harassment in River Falls during the past two elections.

However, city staff believes it's better to have the ordinances in place and not need them, than to need them and not have them, the council packet stated.

The residential picketing ordinance would prohibit targeted residential picketing in the city. This includes marching, standing or patrolling while focused on a single residential dwelling without the occupants' consent. A 1988 US Supreme Court ruling (Frisby v. Schultz) ruled that govern-

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Greg Gossel's art has been exhibited around the world, but his latest piece can be seen in Ellsworth's East End between Danny Dunn's and YB Urban? Photo by Sarah Nigbor

East End's latest mural comes to life

Local orgs bring well-known artist on board

By Sarah Nigbor

ELLSWORTH – The man behind the design of the latest East End mural may live in the town of Trimble, but his work is known throughout the world.

Artist and graphic designer Greg Gossel worked with the E-Town Arts Committee to create the concept for the mural, which celebrates the great things about the Cheese Curd Capital, such as agriculture, the arts, and landscape.

Gossel worked with the committee, which falls under the umbrella of the Ellsworth E3

Community Development Corporation, to narrow down eight or nine options into the final product. Once volunteers scraped and primed the wall, located between Danny Dunn's and YB Urban? on Broadway Street, Gossel was ready to paint. Last week he was hard at work putting brush and paint to concrete as the wall transformed into a vibrant work of art. While the snow on Friday derailed plans to have the public help finish the mural, it received rave reviews at the East End Fall Festival Saturday, Oct. 15.

See MURAL, Page 8

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Humble Horse

from Page 1

horses and exterminated them. Some were made into dog food and glue. They were considered a public nuisance, Loerzel said.

"They didn't consider them useful," Loerzel said. "They weren't big, they weren't draft horses."

The Ojibwe people's relationship with the horses was completely consensual, she explained. The small, sturdy horses would come back every fall and help the Ojibwe during the winter with such tasks as logging and trapping.

"And in turn, we would help them during the foaling season," Loerzel said. "We would offer them protection."

The horses could once be found wherever the Ojibwe people lived, from Winnipeg, Canada to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., to Milwaukee to the Dakotas. In the early 1900s, there were thousands of horses living along the Minnesota/Canadian border. They had adapted to the northern forest region and their small stature helped them easily navigate the dense woods. But by the 1970s, there were only four left. As Native American people were moved onto reservations and into cities, the horses were left behind. The history of the Ojibwe and the horses parallel each other.

In an historic moment dubbed "Heist Across the Ice," four Minnesota men drove north into Canada and rescued the four remaining Ojibwe mares and brought them to safety to a farm in Orr, Minn., before they could be exterminated. Bred with a Spanish mustang, the horses are slowly making a comeback.

The Humble Horse

As a horse-crazy kid growing up in the 'burbs outside Chicago, Loerzel's family didn't have the means or resources to have horses. But the longing was always there.

A couple of years ago, Loerzel was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition that affected her mobility and strength. She was nearly chair-bound. She began therapeutic horseback riding, which opened a gate to her future. And in her mind, the words of her uncle echoed: "Remember, the Ojibwe are horse people too."

As she regained her strength, Loerzel began volunteering with an organization called "This Old Horse," based in Hastings, Minn. In April, she saw a Facebook post from a Canadian rancher who was selling part of their herd of Ojibwe horses because they couldn't afford to feed them anymore, due to COVID.

Loerzel and her husband, River Coakwell, raised enough money to purchase the horses and bring them back to the United States. She founded The Humble Horse, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of the Ojibwe

horse, education and reconnecting the Ojibwe people with the spirit animals. However, there was just one problem: They were living in a townhouse in River Falls, not exactly ideal for horses.

After a long and arduous search in which they were outbid many times on other properties, Loerzel and Coakwell found an 8.5-acre oasis in the town of Gilman for them and the ponies. After living in Seattle for four years, the couple returned to the Midwest to be near family. Coakwell, who is in aviation, works at the Red Wing Regional Airport as a flight dispatcher, while Loerzel, a social worker by trade, has a remote fellowship with the University of Washington.

"It's my ancestral home and their ancestral home," Loerzel said. "We are the only non-profit in the United States dedicated to this breed."

Loerzel, who is a descendent from the White Earth Nation, likes the location because of its close proximity to the First Nations people wanting to reconnect with their horse relatives. She's had visitors from many Anishnaabe (Ojibwe) people from Leech Lake, White Earth, and Lac Courtes Oreilles.

"A lot of people get really emotional," Loerzel said. "It's like they're reclaiming a part of their history that was taken away from them."

Loerzel's father, who is Anishnaabe, was excited when she brought the horses home.

"He's always been really, really supportive," Loerzel said. "Many elders in my community were also elated."

The horses

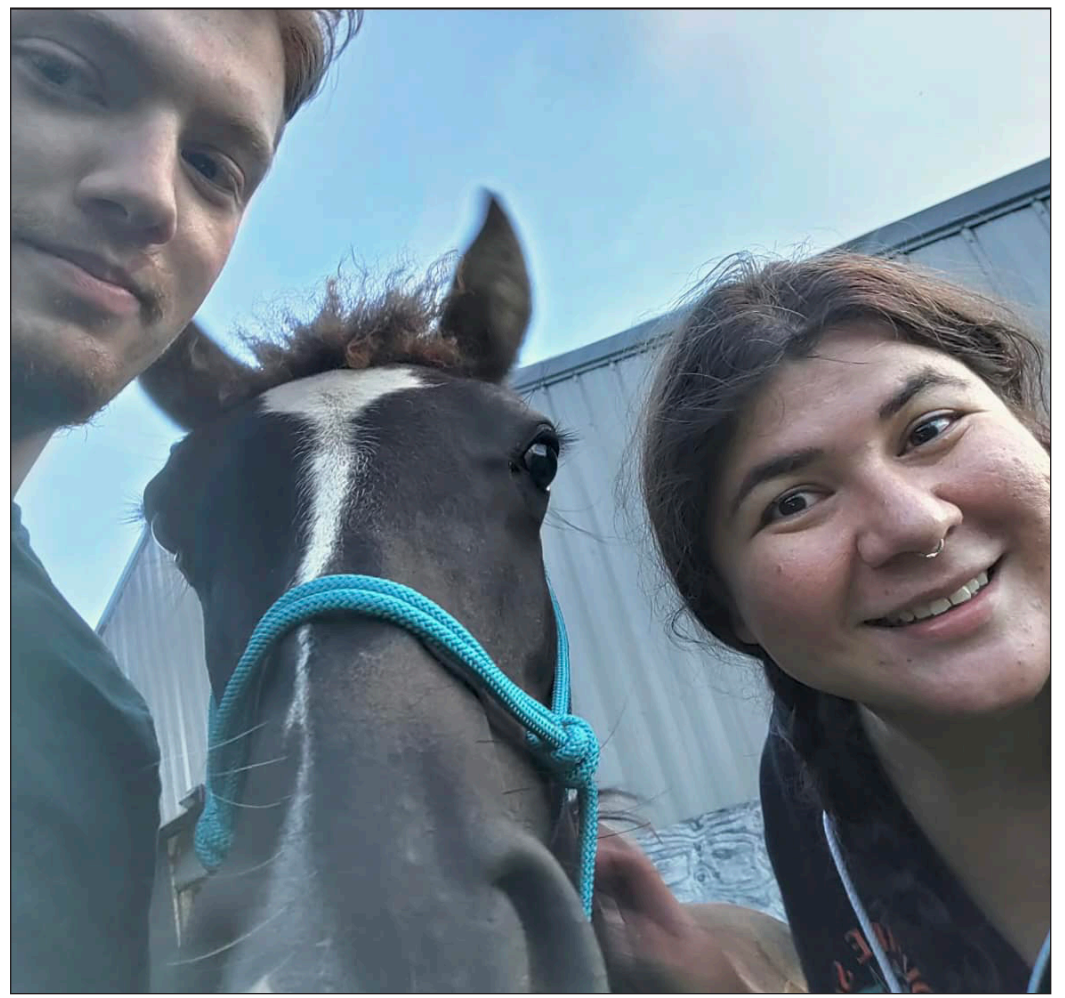
When Loerzel and Coakwell were looking for a property, they hoped to find one that had a varied landscape. They were successful. The ponies graze between large trees, protected by shade but able to seek the sun when they want. The small horses are playful and act like human siblings as Loerzel walks among them distributing hay.

In July, a foal named Animikii (which means thunder in the Ojibwe language) was born, a fitting name since he was born during a thunderstorm. All of the ponies have Ojibwe names: Waabaanakwad (Grey Cloud), Dimii (deep body of water), Noojimo (She Heals), Ode'imini-giizis (Strawberry Moon), Mino Bimaadiziwin (A Good Life), Baswewe (Echo) and of course, Animikii.

"The horses are easy to get along with," said a volunteer at the farm named Lute. "I feel comfortable with them and I miss them. I don't have any of my own, so this allows me to be with horses."

As Loerzel gave the horses hay on a sunny October day, she said none of them has a mean bone in their bodies.

"They're curious. They're small. They're emotionally receptive, very laidback," she



Humble Horse founder Em Loerzel with her husband River Coakley and one of their Ojibwe ponies. Photo courtesy of Em Loerzel

said. "When I brought them here, it was like a little ceremony in itself."

While expanding the herd and the number of these spirit animals across the nation is a goal, it can't be done quickly or taken lightly. And it's not Loerzel's first goal. Her first priority is giving the horses a good home and reconnecting them with their Ojibwe family.

"We're really aiming to expand the herd in a safe and sustainable way," Loerzel said. "We want to prevent genetic bottle-necking."

For that very reason, The Humble Horse is also home to a Spanish mustang. Because the Ojibwe pony population is so small, inbreeding is a concern. Loerzel is also working with UW-River Falls professor Dr. Casie Bass and the equine program there on the best practices for reproduction. Mino, 2, is currently at the university's breeding barn where they are trying to collect semen to freeze. Loerzel joked that he'll get a diploma and graduation cap when he's finished.

Another goal of The Humble Horse is to educate First Nations people about their heritage and share that knowledge with non-First Nations people.

"A lot of people don't talk about race and humans," Loerzel said. "We can use the horses to start that harder conversation. It's not to make people feel guilty, which I think is a common misconception. It's so we don't repeat our past mistakes."

When she was young, "red faces" were everywhere in logos, advertising and sports teams. It's slowly getting better, but there's still a lot of work to do, she said.

For people wanting to support The Humble Horse's mission, donations are gratefully accepted. About \$8 a day will feed the herd hay. Loerzel and Coakwell cover out-of-pocket expenses themselves, supported by grants and donations.

Just don't ask Loerzel to sell the horses. "When people ask me if they can buy one of the horses, I tell them that it would be like if you saw someone selling your nieces and nephews," Loerzel said. "You'd do everything in your power to get them back to where they belong."

Visitors are welcome at the farm every third Saturday. To learn more or to donate, visit thehumblehorsewi.org

RF council

from Page 1

ments have the authority to protect unwilling listeners from unwanted speech when in the privacy of their own homes. That type of picketing is intended to intrude on a resident's privacy and impacts the neighbors around them. The disorderly conduct ordinance creates an added layer of protection for election officials in the city.

"River Falls election workers have not been immune to verbal or emailed election integrity challenges, insinuations, and discourse either," a memo to the council states.

The ordinance will hopefully provide potential and current election workers peace of mind.

The council will vote on the ordinances at a later date.

During public comment, election official Patricia LaRue gave pointers on how to vote smoothly. She recommended knowing where your voting place is (because district boundary lines have changed since 2020). Unmailed absentee ballots must be dropped off at City Hall. Same-day registration is available at the polls for eligible voters, but if you have

questions, contact election officials at 715-425-1688.

"I don't think I'm overreaching or being melodramatic to say that we have military service women and men who died to ensure that each of us have the right to vote. We can repay their service by doing so," LaRue said.

Kennedy Street

Resident and former alderperson Chris Gagne made an impassioned plea to council members to be proactive in policing the Kennedy/Griffey Street neighborhood in which he lives. As an unofficial neighborhood watchman, he would like the city to consider a partnership with neighborhood residents to form a neighborhood watch group. He said unfortunately, most of the problems come from the River Falls Housing Authority residences there.

Gagne said he approached the city about forming a

neighborhood watch group, but nothing has come to fruition. He claimed the city even took down neighborhood watch signs in the Rocky Branch neighborhood.

"Where's your public safety?" he asked. "Are you not trying to build communities or are you trying to tear down the proactive enforcement from our neighborhoods? I think it's sick."

He is often the one to report incidents to River Falls police because his neighbors are afraid of retaliation, Gagne said. One neighbor reported something to RFHA and had someone then try to break into their house. Other neighbors have had food products thrown at their house after complaints are made. Loud domestics, people passed out drunk, drug trafficking are all common occurrences in the area, he said.

"What we need is proactive enforcement," Gagne

said. "We need cops to get out of their car and walk through the neighborhood after dark ... You don't live in that neighborhood. You don't see it every day."

Other business

• The council approved a

resolution declaring a state of disaster stemming from the Sept. 20, 2022 hail storm that damaged public building roofs and membranes. The mayor declared a state of emergency Oct. 7.

• Nov. 1 through March 31

is odd/even winter parking.

• In-person voting is allowed from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 25 through Nov. 4 at City Hall (222 Lewis St.) The Nov. 8 city council meeting will take place Nov. 9 due to the election.

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If you have not yet tried our pizzas this will be your last chance this year! We hope to see you there!

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Dear Neighbor,

My name is Alison Page, and I am a candidate for the Wisconsin State Assembly – District 93.

A little about me

- Family:
 - I am a lifelong resident of River Falls; the sixth of Paul and Lyda Haskins' nine children.
 - My spouse, David, and I have five adult children and seven grandchildren.
- Service:
 - I have served on many boards of directors, including the River Falls School Board, the Workforce Development Board of Western Wisconsin, as well as the boards of the Family Resource Center of St. Croix Valley, the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, and Adoray Home Health and Hospice.
- Employment:
 - I have worked in healthcare my entire life.
 - I began my career as a nurse, and for the past 26 years I have worked in healthcare administration.
 - In February, I retired from Western Wisconsin Health in Baldwin, where I served as CEO for the past 13 years.
- Education:
 - I am a graduate of River Falls High School.
 - I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from Marquette University.
 - I also hold a Master of Healthcare Administration (MHA) degree and a Master of Science (MS) degree, both from the University of Minnesota.

My priorities for Wisconsin:

- Ensure access to healthcare services for the people of Wisconsin, including access to comprehensive reproductive health services;
- Strengthen the economy of Wisconsin – Good businesses – Good jobs;
- Ensure every Wisconsin child reaches adulthood with the emotional resilience, knowledge, and skills needed to pursue their dreams and compete in a 21st century economy;
- Protect and preserve the purity of our water, our air, and our soil;
- Strengthen our democracy – Voting should be fair and secure; every vote should count equally.

I will work to protect your rights and freedoms, and ensure a bright future for our children!

FORWARD!

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