



3 win Al Baker Award  
Sports, Page 7

Contest winner  
Community, Page 20



# THE NORTHWOODS RIVER NEWS

City to host  
informational  
meeting on upcoming  
street projects  
Local News, Page 2

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## Committee recommends hiring Dean of Students at Crescent

Additional program support teacher also recommended

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

The School District of Rhinelander's operations and strategic planning committee has forwarded a pair of hiring recommendations to the full school board for final approval.

On March 6 the panel voted unanimously to recommend the school board hire a Dean of Students for Crescent Elementary School and add an additional program support teacher in special education.

"District leadership has been reviewing and evaluating the system of behavioral support at Crescent Elementary School," district superintendent Eric Burke wrote in a memo to the committee explaining the request for a Dean of Students position there. "With the resignation of the school psychologist, we decided to use an interim Dean of Students position to fill the need for behavioral support. The position has

See **Crescent** . . . page 11

## DNR announces expansion of PFAS testing in Stella

Letters sent to 56 year-round residents and two summer camps

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

The Department of Natural Resources is expanding

its testing of private wells in the Town of Stella for PFAS (per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances) contamination.

Late last week, the agency released a bulletin advising that letters offering cost-free well testing had been sent to 56 year-round residents of the rural eastern Oneida County township who live within 2.5

miles of the intersection of County Highway C and Stella Lake Road.

Two summer camps located within 2.5 miles of the Highway C and Stella Lake Road intersection also received letters, according to the DNR.

"Recipients of these letters are being offered cost-free sampling of their

private well for PFAS," according to the DNR bulletin. "Previous sampling efforts included homeowners within approximately 1 mile of the Stella Town Hall. The DNR plans to complete sampling for eligible homeowners who respond to this offer in March 2023. Home-

See **PFAS** . . . page 18



JEREMY MAYO/RIVER NEWS

## HERE COME THE IRISH

Hundreds flocked to downtown Rhinelander Saturday, March 11, 2023 for the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. The parade included floats representing area families with Irish heritage as well as local businesses and organizations. It's part of an extended St. Patrick's Day celebration in Rhinelander. The downtown pub crawl is ongoing at participating establishments, with the prize drawings set to take place March 17 at Big Daddy's.

## Lake Tomahawk board hears presentation on Pelican River Forest easement issue

Miller: The Conservation Fund wants to preserve land across the U.S.

By Trevor Greene  
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Members of the Lake Tomahawk town board heard a presentation and received insight into the Pelican River Forest land easement purchase by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) during its March 8 meeting.

The presentation from Clint Miller, Midwest project director of The Conservation Fund, wasn't on the meeting agenda but town chairman George DeMet let Miller speak at the end of the meeting.

Miller said he was there to clarify The Conservation Fund (TCF) is the owner of the roughly 56,000 acres of land that is the Pelican River Forest. Nearly 55,000 acres of that land is within the boundaries of Oneida County.

"A lot of people have heard positive things, negative things about this project and some have seen a variety of things in the newspaper, and (the town board) has seen requests for resolutions from various people, and I'm here to answer questions," he said.

Miller, who works out of Rochester, Minn., explained that TCF is a national

nonprofit with a "dual mission."

"Natural resource-based economic development and land conservation," he said. "And where those two pieces come together is a super comfortable place for us," he noted. "So, we do a lot of working farmland protection, a lot of working forest land protection, and then we do projects where you're entering from gateway communities to national parks."

Miller mentioned a "Civil War battlefield project" just outside Fayetteville, Ark. as an example of one of the organization's recent projects.

He said a piece of property was purchased by TCF for the National Park Service, "helping them get it into their

See **Easement** . . . page 12



## PFAS

From page 1

owners with results exceeding DHS public health guidelines will be eligible for in-home bottled water service funded through the DNR. The DNR's review of Oneida County land and tax records indicates that all year-round residents within 2.5 miles of the intersection of County Hwy C and Stella Lake Road who have not already sampled their well for PFAS have been contacted via this mailing. Year-round residents within this area that did not receive a letter or those that have questions can email DNRStellaPFAS@Wisconsin.gov or call 888-626-0605."

As of late January, 24 households in the Town of Stella, which is located approximately 11 miles from Rhinelander, are already receiving emergency water deliveries due to high levels of PFAS in their wells.

The contamination was detected in late 2022 as part of a statewide well testing project.

Some of the results from Stella represent some of the highest PFAS readings found in the state to date, according to the DNR. One woman who spoke during a January public meeting with DNR

officials on the contamination issue said her next door neighbor's well showed PFAS contamination at more than 40,000 ppt (parts per trillion).

For context, the recommended safe level is 20 ppt.

PFAS are a group of human-made chemicals used for decades in numerous products, including non-stick cookware, fast food wrappers, stain-resistant sprays and certain types of firefighting foam. These contaminants have made their way into the environment through accidental spills of PFAS-containing materials, discharges of PFAS-containing wastewater to treatment plants and certain types of firefighting foams, according to the DNR. These chemicals are known to accumulate in the human body, posing several risks to human health including certain cancers, liver damage and decreased fertility.

DNR officials have stressed that it may take years, if ever, to determine what caused the contamination in Stella

"(PFAS) marches to the beat of its own drummer in the environment," DNR remediation and redevelopment program manager Christine Sieger stated during a late January media briefing on the

Stella PFAS investigation. "It doesn't behave like other things in the environment and so investigation into PFAS... like any other contaminant, can take years. In some cases we're not going to find a responsible party. We're going to look and we might find that we can't tell where it's coming from. We could find that there are multiple sources responsible. It's an iterative process and it's one that takes time."

One potential source of the contamination mentioned by Stella residents during the January public meeting was the use of sludge on agricultural fields in the town.

On Feb. 7, in response to an inquiry from the River News, the DNR confirmed the City of Rhinelander and the Ahlstrom-Munksjo paper mill spread sludge in Stella from the late 1990s to 2011, in the case of the city, and 2021 in the case of the mill.

"We can confirm that both sewage sludge (also known as biosolids) from the Rhinelander Wastewater Treatment Facility and Paper Mill Sludge from the Ahlstrom-Munksjo Specialty Solutions Facility (also known as Expera Specialty Solutions) was spread in the Town of Stella," DNR field operations manager Tim Ryan said in

response to a request from the newspaper for information on the agency's documentation of the use of sludge in Stella. "The City of Rhinelander has spread biosolids on 8 different sites in the Town of Stella between 1997 and 2011. Ahlstrom Munksjo (or previous owners) have spread paper mill sludge on 63 different sites in the Town of Stella between 1996 and 2021."

According to the DNR, spreading for both Rhinelander and Ahlstrom-Munksjo "likely occurred before 1996 as well" but the agency's database only goes back to 1996.

"The Department is still analyzing data submitted for 2022 which is not submitted until the end of January for each previous year," Ryan noted.

In disclosing the information on the past use of sludge in Stella, the agency was careful to note it cannot definitively say the spreading of sludge caused the contamination.

"The Department does not have PFAS data for the paper mill sludge or sewage sludge/biosolids that was land applied," Ryan said. "The Department is in the process of identifying potential sources."

In response to the report, Addie Teeters, head of marketing communications & pub-

lic affairs for Ahlstrom Munksjo, stressed that the company received permits from the DNR for its "landspreading activities."

"Since Ahlstrom acquired the Rhinelander mill in 2018, it has continued participating in a regulated biosolids landspreading program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources," Teeters wrote in response to an email request for comment on the DNR report. "As part of that program, we have received and operate pursuant to permits issued by the Department. We maintain records which are provided to the Department relating to our ongoing landspreading activities."

"Ahlstrom has led the marketplace in developing PFAS-free technology for more than a decade and utilizes our FluoroFree® technology at the Rhinelander mill," she added.

"At this time the City cannot validate what spreading the DNR may have authorized in the 1990s and early 2000's," city attorney Steve Sorenson wrote in response to a request for comment from the city regarding its past history of spreading sludge in Stella.

"Since I have been with the City there has been no spreading of biosolids in the Town of Stella by the City," Sorenson added.

"Even though I was not involved nor were any of the current staff of the City involved it is the desire of the City of Rhinelander to maintain the quality of our water supply. This is where the city is directing its efforts. The City is looking at new filtration systems and a potential new well or wells to insure safe water to the citizens of Rhinelander. The City is looking to the future rather than spending time in the 'blame game' environment that so many others are supporting. Our most recent tests of the City water supply demonstrates that the City's commitment to safe water is working."

Indeed, the City Council voted last month to retain the services of MSA Professional Services for investigation and development of a location for a proposed Well No. 9.

A new well has been deemed necessary as two city wells located near the Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport — No. 7 and No. 8 — have been offline since 2019 due to unsafe levels of PFAS contamination.

The city currently has three functioning wells.

The new well is not expected to be operational until the end of 2024 at the earliest, according to the public works department.

## Easement

From page 12

support" for the project but not as much from elected officials.

"For those of you who were at, or saw the news articles of the Oneida County board meeting, there were 22 people that got up or spoke in support of the project and specifically around the resolution that was requested by one of the supervisors saying 'Look, we don't want to use Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds to do this' and they basically wanted to send a message to the legislature," he said. "Getting out the word to your elected officials is an important part of the project,

certainly for the next 90 days."

Oneida County board member Tony Rio, whose district includes ward 2 of Lake Tomahawk, told others at the meeting if they are in support of the project there is time to speak to county supervisors before the tabled resolution comes back before the county board at its May 17 meeting.

"I, personally, kind of see both sides of what they're saying," he said. "I am much more in favor of the easements and supporting that than I am with the whole other side. But there's a lot going on there. There's a committee that has been created specifically for this. I will say that it is primarily comprised with supervi-

sors that are on the board who were in favor of the resolution against it. So, take that for what you will."

However, Rio said there is an opportunity for residents to influence that committee. He also pointed out "that at the end of the day, it is an advisory resolution that gets sent down to Madison."

"There's a lot of things in the county that a lot of people focus on (and) this has kind of taken on a life of its own," Rio said. "It will definitely be the focus point until May."

He again encouraged everyone who is interested or cares about the Pelican River Forest project to contact not just him but other county board supervisors as well to offer input.

## Digest

From page 11

zation is a corrupt organization that President Trump got us out of, but President Biden disgracefully re-joined," Tiffany said. "The United States should be in charge of our own pandemic policy; we should never outsource that power to an international bureaucracy that behaves like a puppet of Communist China. This legislation puts congressional oversight and transparency into what otherwise could be bad medicine for America's public health."

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) introduced identical legislation in the Senate. Johnson said the WHO, along with federal health agencies, failed miserably in their response to Covid-19.

"This failure should not be rewarded with a new inter-

national treaty that would increase the WHO's power at the expense of American sovereignty," Johnson said. "I'm proud to reintroduce this legislation to hold the WHO accountable for their failures and increase transparency for the American people. The sovereignty of the United States is not negotiable."

Tiffany said Americans remain skeptical of continuing infringements on personal liberties and freedoms, especially after the Biden administration's failed Covid-19 response and the WHO's mismanagement of the pandemic, which he says included ignoring early warnings from Taiwan about the outbreak of Covid-19 and reinforcing lies from the Communist Chinese Party that there was "no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission."

## Bond

From page 3

After further forensic analysis, the complaint states Aschbrenner's laptop was found to have up to eight explicit internet searches related to child pornography and pedophilia.

The complaint also lists five "key words" which allegedly appeared in uniform resource locators (URLs) on the laptop, one of which included "various articles pertaining to people who have been arrested

for possession of child pornography."

Additionally, the complaint states the digital forensic examiner identified several images from books which depict nude children on the laptop's hard drive.

Also identified on Aschbrenner's laptop, according to the complaint, was software titled CCleaner, "a utility which can remove/delete digital files from a hard drive, and delete the internet browsing history from one's computer."

As of Thursday, March 9, Aschbrenner is no longer

employed by MHLT.

The MHLT school district's board of education accepted his resignation during a special meeting Thursday.

It was effective immediately.

If convicted of the Class D felony, Aschbrenner faces a fine of up to \$100,000 and imprisonment for 25 years, or both.

A motion hearing in this case is scheduled for March 15 at 11:30 a.m. and a preliminary hearing is scheduled for April 14 at 2 p.m. at the Vilas County Courthouse in Eagle River.