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Family gives back after loss of child

Donates gift baskets to Wisconsin hospitals for mothers



Courtesy of Kristen Flanagan

Addy Flanagan with a stocked car of gift baskets to be delivered to mothers who have lost babies.

By Chris Barlow
Special to The Freeman

OCONOMOWOC — Losing a child is a traumatic event for anyone to endure. When Kristen Flanagan lost a daughter during childbirth, she turned to a support group for help coping with the trauma she was experiencing. “It was really hard to take in,” Flanagan said. “It was a very sad

thing and we decided to turn it into something good.” After experiencing the much-needed assistance from the support group, Kristen and eight-year-old daughter Addy wanted to help other grieving mothers in similar situations. With the emotions from their loss still fresh the pair decided to put together baskets of helpful items. “Addy has been an active part of the whole process,” Flanagan said.

“Not only did we grieve, so did Addy. It was her little sister.” Flanagan knew that to accomplish she and her daughter’s goals they needed to raise some funds and began by naming the program after her late baby Emmy. She posted a fundraiser on Facebook, and Emmy’s Enchantments was off and running. See **BASKETS**, PAGE 7A

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WAUKESHA

Area legislative leaders, DPI chief clash over Waukesha district policy

State superintendent wrote letter to Waukesha superintendent; local officials respond

By Karen Pilarski
kpilarski@conley.net.com
262-513-2657

WAUKESHA — Local legislative leaders are accusing State Superintendent Jill Underly of undermining local control after she wrote a letter to Waukesha School District Superintendent Jim Sebert and the Board of Education urging the reversal of the district’s Controversial Issues in the Classroom Policy. State Rep. Scott Allen, R-Waukesha; State Rep. Adam Neylon, R-Pewaukee; State Senator Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield; and State Senator Rob Hutton, R-Brookfield sent a letter in response to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction chief.

Underly’s letter expressed concern about potential harm to students and staff over the policy. She alludes to the controversy over the “Rainbowland” song. Underly mentioned the decision to place an employee on administrative leave. Melissa Tempel, a dual language teacher at Heyer Elementary School for the first grade, was put on administrative leave. According to her Twitter profile, Tempel calls herself an “teacher activist.” It is not known why she is on leave or if it has to do with the controversy over the “Rainbowland” song, which Tempel had wanted to include in a spring first-grade concert at Heyer Elementary School. See **POLICY**, PAGE 4A

SOUND OFF
What do you think?
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Lake Country community members express concerns over roadside trash

By Faith Rae
frae@conley.net.com
262-513-2644

HARTLAND — Lake Country community members have expressed concerns over trash along their highways, and with Earth Day coming up on Saturday, residents and business owners are looking to spread awareness and connect with groups to keep their communities clean. Kim Schlise owns a garden center in Hartland, and living in the Town Erin in Washington County, she uses the

Hwy 83 corridor at least twice a day. While driving, she’s witnessed trash bags falling off of garbage trucks on multiple occasions. “The little truck that was tagged onto the back was full of trash, and when it turned the corner, a whole bag of garbage fell off the back of this truck, and it just kept going,” said Schlise who saw the truck turn onto Hwy 83 from Hwy K. “I was disgusted by that.” Owing a garden center, Schlise said she gets a lot of plastic and packing material. Recently, one of her packing sheets flew out of the garbage when it

was being emptied, said Schlise. She found the piece of trash in a power line before it flew into a tree across the street. She had someone retrieve it for her. “Hwy 16 is right next to me,” said Schlise. “I don’t need those big sheets of plastic going and getting on someone’s car or wrapped up in somebody’s engine.” Oconomowoc resident Susan Schrank recently moved back from Germany and took her frustrations See **TRASH**, PAGE 8A



Kevin Mattson stands next to the 11 bags of trash that members of the Lake Country Optimist Club cleaned up on the side of Hwy K. Five Arrowhead High School students and five adults attended the cleanup on April 15. Courtesy of Kevin Mattson

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WEATHER

Tomorrow:
Mostly cloudy
High 44 / Low 35

See complete forecast on Page 8A

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A place to call home

Bridge Church renovates former St. Matthew's buildings into permanent location

By Katherine Beck
Special to The Freeman

OCONOMOWOC — Being a portable church worked well for Bridge Church for more than four years in Oconomowoc, but with a desire to have longevity in a city it calls home, church leadership decided it was time to find a permanent location where it could welcome more guests and serve people for generations to come.

The opportunity for a new permanent location presented itself when St. Matthew's Church and School vacated its location on Wisconsin Avenue to move into its new buildings at 1650 Brown St.

Tyler Wolfe, associate pastor of Bridge Church and campus pastor for the Oconomowoc congregation, has plenty of plans for the new location, but is most excited that children and their families will be able to walk to the new building, which should be ready to host services in early June.

The main Bridge Church campus is located at 1314 S. Grand Ave. in Waukesha. In total, between the two campuses, Bridge Church welcomes about 1,000 people on Sundays with about 120 of those attending in Oconomowoc.

In January 2019, a portable church was created in Oconomowoc that first met in Nature Hill Intermediate School before the pandemic shut things down. Later, Bridge Church relocated to the Oconomowoc Community Center where it held services waiting for the school to welcome them back. However, they realized how great the Community Center was and decided to stay there.

But, with the church membership growing and wanting to have a long-term presence in the Oconomowoc community, Wolfe said a new permanent location was needed.

"The portability has served us well, but it would not serve the longevity of our mission in Lake Country," he said. "It opens up the door for us to be a community organization far beyond me and my current team. Having a permanent space means we can be here forever and serving the community."

The former St. Matthew's campus was deemed a good fit for the congregation, especially since it was less than a mile from the Community Center. Lake Country Classical

Academy occupies about two-thirds of the space, but an ample amount will remain for Bridge Church to host meetings, services and other events. It also means Bridge Church groups will have a place to go for weekday meetings, because currently they often have to find a room to rent.

Wolfe emphasized that Bridge Church views itself as a teammate of other churches in the community and doesn't want it to feel like a competition.

"We are very excited for them with their new building on Brown Street," Wolfe said of St. Matthew's. Other church and community groups will also be welcome to use rooms at the new Bridge Church campus building.

The highest priority, however, is to provide a "safe place for kids to grow," Wolfe said. The church places a significant focus on youth ministries. The school's gym is being kept and will be open for kids and teenagers.

Recovery meetings for people dealing with alcohol or drug addiction will also be held in the renovated church building.

"We make a very big deal out of recovery mission," he said.

Plenty of work needs to be completed before Bridge Church is ready to welcome worshippers. The foyer area has been opened up for better socializing, as well as a full-service café with seating has been constructed. There will also be a nursing mothers room below the sanctuary, which is also getting a big update with modern technology and decorating aesthetics, Wolfe said. People who visited St. Matthew's services in the brick building won't be totally lost because while the pews have been removed, the stained-glass windows remain.

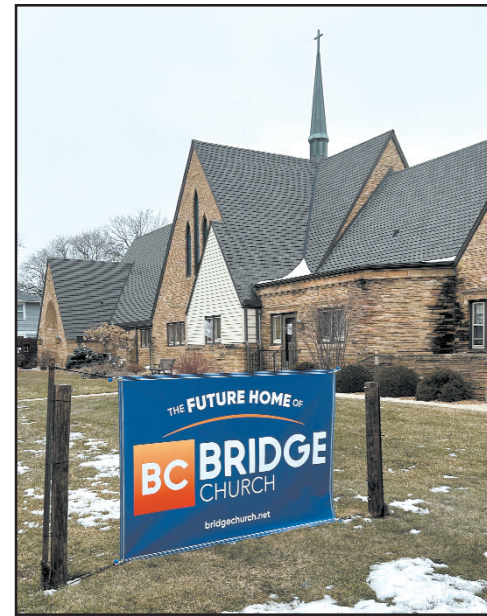
"It's more modern but with old character," Wolfe said. "It will remind you of the church you went to as a kid."

While services should hopefully begin in early summer in the renovated building, a larger grand opening celebration will be planned for September after all of the new sound, video, lighting and other systems are learned.

"It is so important to us that anyone who feels unwelcomed knows that there is a place for them to be welcomed," Wolfe said. "Anyone who feels alone or has doubts, that there is a place for them to have their doubts. Come exactly as they are and come and ask the important questions in life."



The interior of the former St. Matthew's Church is being updated to have a more modern look, but some original features like the stained glass windows will remain.



Submitted photos

Members of Bridge Church are renovating the former St. Matthew's Church location on Wisconsin Avenue to be the future home of the church, which currently holds services in the Community Center. The first service in the new location should be held in early June.



From left, Jake Janowski, Kyle Spuhler and Darrin Campbell hang a cross in the future home of Bridge Church in Oconomowoc.

Fitzgerald joins House Republicans in passing Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act

WAUKESHA — House Republicans on Thursday passed H.R. 734, the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act, in what a press release from Wisconsin U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald's office said is a bill to protect female athletes and the integrity of women's sports.



Fitzgerald

"This legislation protects female athletes' right to an even playing field in sporting events by ensuring athletic departments follow Title IX rules requiring the recognition of biological sex as determined by a person's reproductive biology and genetics at birth," the Fitzgerald press release said. "Democrats have aggressively pushed an agenda to allow transgender athletes to compete against athletes not of their same biological sex. House Republicans recognize that cases in which biological males wish to compete against females presents an unfair advantage and diminishes the hard work of female athletes."

Fitzgerald said, "Female athletes have been abandoned by those on the Left seeking to allow biological males to compete in women's divisions. ... This extreme agenda puts hardworking female athletes at a disadvantage and risks denying them of scholarships, awards, and other athletic opportunities despite their hard work. I'm proud to stand up for all the women and girls in sports

across this country by supporting this legislation."

The bill may face an uphill battle in the Democratic-controlled Senate, where it goes next.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education is proposing a new rule that it says will protect transgender athletes from discrimination under Title IX. "The proposed rule would establish that policies violate Title IX when they categorically ban transgender students from participating on sports teams consistent with their gender identity just because of who they are. The proposed rule also recognizes that in some instances, particularly in competitive high school and college athletic environments, some schools may adopt policies that limit transgender students' participation. The proposed rule would provide schools with a framework for developing eligibility criteria that protects students from being denied equal athletic opportunity, while giving schools the flexibility to develop their own participation policies."

The proposed new rule makes the passage of H.R. 734 "unnecessary and harmful," the GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders said Thursday.

The proposed rulemaking will be open for public comment until May 15. Citizens may comment at <https://www.regulations.gov/document/ED-2022-OCR-0143-0001>.

Wisconsin GOP lawmakers working on medical pot legalization

MADISON (AP) — After years of opposition to any form of marijuana legalization in Wisconsin, Republican lawmakers are now working privately to build support for a medical cannabis program that could win bipartisan backing and be enacted into law later this year, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos told The Associated Press on Thursday.

For now, the group of lawmakers — whom Vos declined to name — are working only among Assembly Republicans to build enough support, and he hopes to introduce the plan this fall. Vos has long backed some form of medical marijuana program, but no bill has ever received a vote in either the GOP-controlled Assembly or Senate.

Vos said he remains steadfastly opposed to legalizing recreational marijuana and does not want to create a medical program that would be a precursor to that. Wisconsin remains an outlier nationally, with medical marijuana legal in 38 states and recreational marijuana legal in 21.

The push for legalization in Wisconsin has gained momentum, as neighboring Illinois and Michigan allow recreational use while Minnesota and Iowa have legalized medical use.

"We are not Illinois. We are not California. We are not Colorado," Vos said in an interview. "We are a state that's at best purple. And purple is not legal-

ization of recreational marijuana." Vos's announcement that Republicans have been working on a deal he hopes can pass the Legislature comes on April 20, or "420 Day," marijuana's high holiday.

Advocates for pot legalization planned to announce a "Grass Routes Tour" that will make four stops across the state to promote cannabis legalization.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers proposed full legalization of marijuana in his state budget, an idea that Republicans vowed to reject.

Last April 20, a Republican-authored bill creating a medical marijuana program received a public hearing, the first time any such bill made it that far in the GOP-controlled Legislature.

However, the bill died in committee. Senate Republicans have been less open to pot legalization than those in the Assembly. But in January, Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu said a bill to create a medical marijuana program could pass this legislative session — as long as regulations are put forward to ensure it's for those in serious pain.

Sixty-four percent of Wisconsinites support legalizing marijuana for any use, according to October polling by the Marquette University Law School. More than 80% of Wisconsinites supported the idea of a medical marijuana program, according to 2019 polling.

Policy

From Page 1A

District officials removed "Rainbowland" by Dolly Parton and Miley Cyrus from the concert due to conflict with the district's Controversial Issues in the Classroom Policy. The story has made national headlines.

"As district leaders, you can choose to re-evaluate the decision to place a district employee on administrative leave and, instead, recognize that 'acknowledging the rights of [the district's] professional staff members as citizens in a democratic society' is, in fact, in the best interests of the School District of Waukesha," she said.

"Whether you realize it or not, you are, under the guise of protection, causing undue harm to students and staff," she said.

In a separate letter, Allen said Underly failed to provide examples of how the policy harms students. He also said she could have called Sebert to talk through the issues instead of sending the letter.

"The controversy has to do with a school district policy that seeks to keep the focus on education instead of indoctrination. In calling for a change to that policy, Superintendent Underly is violating the principle of local control of school boards. Meanwhile, Wisconsin math and reading scores have dropped during the tenure of Superintendent Underly, and Wisconsin ranks as the worst state for discrepancies between black and white students. Instead of focusing on quality public education, Superintendent Underly has chosen to engage in stirring up political controversy without even taking time to understand the facts," said Allen. "Is it any wonder that Wisconsin



Underly

Allen

Sebert

schools are struggling academically under her current leadership?"

Underly accuses the district of making decisions that have added to the stressors of educators and causing a toxic environment.

"Toxicity undoubtedly contributes to teachers leaving the profession, and we cannot afford to lose our educator workforce to misguided choices made in the name of student protection," she said.

Underly added that she worries for the future of the district and its ability to retain and attract teachers in the years to come.

Controversial Issues policy

The district created the Controversial Issues in the Classroom Policy in 2021.

The district said certain signage within classrooms, including flags and posters about Pride, Black Lives Matter, Thin Blue Line, and more was not permitted.

The administration's stated reasoning behind the signage directive has been to keep classroom displays within the confines of curriculum. The policy also states controversial topics include those that might create significant disagreement within the community.

In March 2022 the district debuted "Our

Commitment to All" signs. The signs are designed to further ensure that schools and classrooms are welcoming environments for teaching and learning.

Underly said in her letter that the district should re-evaluate the Controversial Issues in the Classroom Policy.

By changing course, according to Underly, residents of Waukesha and Wisconsin will see the high priority the district places on ensuring a well-rounded education for students.

The local Legislative leaders, who quoted the DPI website, said Underly's mission is to "ensure that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to quality public education programs, enrichment opportunities, and special education supports, so that all of our kids can be successful."

They said Underly's letter doesn't align with the DPI website's mission.

"It has nothing to do with helping students access quality public education, enrichment opportunities or special education supports. Instead, your letter is political activism that does not belong in our schools. We are proud of our school district and its actions, because they did what was best for its students and in line with what the parents of the district wanted," the local legislative leaders said.

The local legislative leaders further accuse Underly of weighing in on a politically-charged issue without getting all the facts and without speaking to the Waukesha School Board.

"Your letter also undermines local control. You should trust that the people of Waukesha have elected a board that represents them. The policies they enact reflect the values of the local community. This is what local control is all about," the local Legislative leaders said.

Waukesha superintendent responds

Sebert responded to Underly's letter by highlighting the district being the seventh largest in the state. He said the district serves 11,000 students and 18,000 parents in the community of over 90,000 residents.

"Our kids are diverse in many ways, including from an ethnic and socio-economic perspective. They are also diverse in their needs to achieve academically. To meet these diverse student needs, we have taken consistent steps as a board and administration to ensure the focus in our classrooms and in our schools is one of academic rigor and achievement," Sebert said.

Sebert also included an attachment that highlights accomplishments and milestones of the district.

Sebert's response also addresses how important local control is to the board and school administration to make decisions.

"As the State Superintendent, you likely realize that with over 400 school districts in Wisconsin, one size does not fit all of us on any given topic. In the future, I would hope that you would ask for our perspective on topics as leaders first as opposed to forming your opinion based on a press release from an advocacy group," Sebert said.

The Alliance for Education in Waukesha, a grassroots parent group, has been critical of the district. In the statement, the AEW said it has been in contact with the Department of Justice and the Wisconsin Department of Public Education. Their mission was to encourage SDW to rescind the controversial policy.