



Rib Lake Ice Age Days
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ALEX WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Medford City Coordinator Joe Harris took a turn in the dunk tank during the Chair Affair event held Aug. 10 on Main St. in Medford. (left) The event also included the dedication of a bench in memory of longtime downtown promoter Jeff Miller who died in July 2022. Carol O'Leary of the Friends of the Downtown spoke about the impact Miller had on the Medford community. Joining O'Leary was Miller's mother Marilyn and sister Beth Baker along with Jackie Jentzsch and Judi Tacke of the Friends of the Downtown.



Park Fest celebration tonight in Medford

BY MATT KRUEGER
 REPORTER

The Medford Chamber of Commerce is once again hosting "Parkfest" tonight, August 17th. The Chamber is celebrating the community with free general admission. This year's event will again have free swim at the city pool from 1-4:30 p.m., food truck alley, a 5K or kids 1K color run at 5 p.m., as well as music. New to Parkfest this year will be

Wisconsin's own, Mad Dog and Merrill, America's favorite grill buddies. Together, they host "Mad Dog and Merrill Midwest Grill'n" TV show. The show airs in 35 states and in more than 140 markets. They will be taping an episode of the show while at Parkfest.

"If you want to be on TV, now is your time to shine," Mad Dog mentioned during a recent interview with K99's Dave Flegel discussing tonight's festivities. Along with Mad Dog and Merrill will be

"Fast Freddy on the Keyboards." Mad Dog and Merrill Midwest Grill'n will start at 4:30 p.m.. The Chamber of Commerce would like to remind attendees to please bring your own lawn chair to the event.

The music headliner this year will be country music singer/songwriter Keith Anderson. Anderson's album "Three Chord Country and American Rock & Roll," was certified Gold and garnered

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Critical of coverage

County rejects change to ambulance contract for additional wage costs

BY BRIAN WILSON
 NEWS EDITOR

Taylor County will hold Aspirus to the cost split in the existing service contract despite rapidly rising staff costs due to critical coverage.

After kicking the can down the road for the past few months, members of the Taylor County Law Enforcement and Emergency Services committee on Friday formally rejected an amendment to ambulance service contract which would have shifted more of the costs for the critical coverage to county taxpayers.

Faced with not enough ambulance crews to cover shifts, particularly in the Gilman and Rib Lake areas early last spring, the county authorized offering critical coverage rates to provide incentives for Aspirus staff from both this area and around the region.

Ambulance administrator Bob Kirkley told committee members that due to the extra pay incentives under the criti-

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BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Law enforcement committee member Lorie Floyd questions a proposed amendment to the ambulance service contract.

PAGE 12B: Library chalk coloring contest winners announced

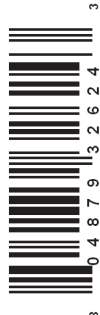


SPORTS: Busy baseball action at Rib Lake



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Rib Lake library director reports on busy summer

BY MATT KRUEGER
REPORTER

The Rib Lake Library gave a report to the board during the monthly village board meeting on August 9. The purpose of speaking in front of the board was to give the board an update on the success of the library and highlight the budget that they have been working with for years.

Tamara Blomberg, the Rib Lake Library Director, spoke about the success of the summer programs the library offered. She said "This year's summer library programs (during the months of June and July) had seventeen different programs that brought in nine hundred people." She continued, "We are doing things to bring people into the community."

Blomberg then highlighted numbers from the library's 2022 annual report. The library had eleven thousand four hundred and forty visitors in 2022. Those visitors checked out fifteen thousand four hundred and fifty-six items.

Blomberg then discussed the a few key take aways that she wanted the board to know. The first being that there is a basic formula that the Rib Lake Library uses to request funds from Taylor County. She wanted the board to know that it isn't a random request for funds and that the county generally funds the Rib Lake Library at least one hundred percent of their request.

The second take away that Blomberg wanted the board to know is that the formula they use only includes physical items that are checked out from the library. (In 2022, this number was fifteen thousand four hundred and fifty six items.) It does not include programs, printing, faxes, computer use, WiFi, or even digital downloads.

Third, the Taylor county requests excludes anyone

who uses the library that has an address within the village of Rib Lake. Blomberg made clear, "We are not double dipping."

Lastly, Blomberg requested (as the board starts budget talks next month) reimbursement from the Village for \$43,784. Currently the Rib Lake Library gets \$37,000 from the village. Blomberg pointed out "I looked back ten years and we have not had an increase in those ten years." She added that she would like to increase the pay of their employees. She said, "four of our six employees make less than \$12/hour. Ogema has an open position and they are starting at \$12/hour President Bill Schreiner requested that Blomberg provide the board with a copy of the budget. Blomberg said she would get the board that information before their next meeting.

Historical Display

There will be a new display coming to the Village Hall in Rib Lake. The Rib Lake Historical Society has been working on a display detailing the railroad history in Rib Lake. Bob Rusch of the Rib Lake Historical Society said, "I think its going to be a marvelous display." This display will be ready by November 1. While speaking to the board, Rusch asked that the board also consider a ribbon cutting ceremony when the display is finished and put up at the village hall building.

During Rusch's discussion with the board, he also asked that others with historical items from the Rib Lake area, contact the Rib Lake Historical Society. He asks that residents loan them photos and documents of Rib Lake's history so that they can scan them and return them.

Band Shell

Trustee Russ Bullis gave an update to the board on the band shell project. Since representatives from the

Friends of Rib Lake Group were unable to attend, he said that he had spoken to Laura Deuso, a member of the Friends of Rib Lake Group, earlier in the day. Bullis said, "The Friends of Rib Lake have met with an architect and they should have drawings by mid-September." He also mentioned that, "The group would hope to finish the project by Ice Age Days 2024."

In other business:

★ Chief Derek Beckstrand gave the board an update on the new security cameras that were installed on the village-owned building on McComb Ave. Chief Beckstrand said they were able to install the cameras and that they are working well.

★ Approved the Seet machinery replacement CD renewal. This is an 11 month CD at 4.3%.

★ The board approved the applications for the Special Class B Picnic Licenses for Ice Age Days. The licenses were approved for the Rib Lake Lions Club, American Legion and Rib Lake Fish and Game.

★ The board approved a picnic license for Good Shepherd Church for their annual Fall Fest Days.

★ The board discussed the School Resource Officer Memorandum of Understanding. Trustee Bullis mentioned that he had talked to Travis Grubbs, the District Administrator for the Rib Lake School District, earlier in the week and that the village cannot approve anything until the school board approves the contract. He said that the school board is meeting tomorrow.

★ Trustee Bullis discussed the new items the fire department has ordered to help for electric vehicle fires. Fire departments across the country are having a hard time extinguishing electric vehicle fires. Bullis added, "We have not seen any yet, but we know they are coming."

★ County committee rejects contract change to pay for critical coverage

Continued from page 1

cal coverage status, the salaries for the ambulance service are currently \$238,000 above what was budgeted. Under the agreement with the county and Aspirus, the cost the county is responsible for is 45% of the budget of the department.

Under that agreement, Aspirus promises to provide 24 hour a day coverage for the county residents. The ambulance service has come under fire, particularly among those in the Gilman area regarding coverage gaps due to staffing. Kirkley explained that at the time the contract was reached it was with the understanding that it would be staffed with a combination of on-call personnel from the community and full-time staff.

Due to demographic changes with on-call ambulance crew members retiring as well as the loss of crew members during the period of federally mandated COVID-19 restrictions, the number of on-call personnel willing to take shifts has dwindled. This has left Aspirus needing to pay full time emergency medical service employees to cover shifts. The federal mandates and all COVID-19 requirements have been lifted, but Kirkley noted people still haven't come back.

Kirkley described that system as being unsustainable given the overall low call volumes at each of the three ambulance locations. In the past, Rib Lake, Medford and Gilman had maintained separate licenses, although it has always been a single county-wide service, the county merged them into a single license to make it easier to shift staff from one area to another. Kirkley noted that with the call volumes in each of the areas, the state would have likely pulled the licenses for not having enough volume.

According to Kirkley, having full time crews in each area is not the best option and said what is needed in Gilman is to have an on-call crew. However, there have not been people willing to do this.

"Could we look at reversing that?" asked committee chair Lynn Rosemeyer. Rosemeyer is new to the committee and replaces former chairman Lester Lewis who

is no longer on the county board.

Rosemeyer questioned if there were people at Gilman Cheese or at the school district who could be on-call while they were working. Kirkley said he has spoken with the crew member who works at the school offering that option to him, but the individual has not wished to leave his classroom for calls.

"I may have a conversation with the school superintendent," Rosemeyer said.

"I don't think this committee or the county board feels we are covering Gilman and Rib Lake properly," said committee member Lorie Floyd. She objected to the idea that the coverage terms of the contract are being met by having a crew in Medford.

Kirkley explained the issue goes far beyond Taylor County and is statewide and nationwide with not having enough people going into EMS. He noted that he is driving to Ironwood two night a week to teach classes and that he was willing to work with the technical colleges to offer classes in Taylor County.

"It isn't just Taylor County, it is everywhere through the United States," Kirkley said.

Floyd questioned if people weren't interested in getting the training to be EMTs then why would they be interested in getting classes to be first responders, referring to efforts to get a county-wide first responder program underway in the county. There is a significant difference in the number of hours of training for each level.

Committee member Ray Soper questioned the rationale for changing the contract in the middle of the year and stated that Aspirus should have been aware of the staffing issues.

"We have a contract. I think it needs to be upheld for this year," said committee member Chuck Zenner.

Committee member Catherine Lemke agreed noting the budget is coming up and they would need to figure out something for 2024.

The county ambulance service subsidy is not part of the overall tax levy limit that impacts other county op-

erations, but is a separate levy, similar to how debt service is figured and included in the overall county taxes.

Rosemeyer also raised questions about why Scott Copenhagen was not hired back to work for the ambulance service. Copenhagen lives in Gilman and served on the ambulance service there for many years. During Covid-19 he left Taylor County Ambulance Service and is currently working for the ambulance service in Rusk County. Rosemeyer said the public needs to know why he was not hired back.

Kirkley said that due to confidentiality he could not give her that information. Zenner defended Kirkley's stand noting there are privacy concerns and that with anything personnel related just because the committee members may not know the details it doesn't mean it isn't justified.

In the end the committee members voted unanimously to reject the proposed amendment to the contract that would have shifted the additional personnel cost due to the critical coverage to the county.

In related action, Rosemeyer made a request from sheriff Larry Woebbeking for the call information regarding an ambulance call that occurred this spring with an individual who died.

"It might help us in some decision making," Rosemeyer said, explaining she was interested in putting together a timeline of what had happened that day and "what really did transpire" with call and response times.

Woebbeking said he would compile the reports for the sheriff's department and dispatch and would forward the request to the Gilman Police Department to share their records of the event.



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