



And, action!
Big Water Film Festival returns, **A3**

On track:
CANSKI team ready for season, **B1**



Ashland Daily Press

ASHLANDDAILYPRESS.NET

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022

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MAILING LABEL ONLY



Bayview Motel residents have been given a month to vacate the premises. The motel has been operating as transitional housing for quite some time but is being sold. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

Bayview Motel residents get eviction notices

BY **TOM STANKARD**,
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On a recent cold, windy and snowy afternoon, Preston Edwards tried to explain what he and his mother will face when they are forced to move from Ashland's Bayview Motel.

The 20-year-old and his mother have been staying at the motel for about three months.

Owner Tony Urgo took them in and gave them a place to stay for about \$500 a month until they could get back on their feet. But inflation and other factors have driven Urgo to put the motel, which has been serving as low-income apartments, up for sale and



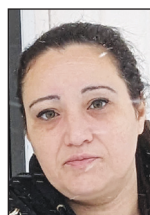
Urgo

he has found a buyer.

As a result, Urgo recently gave Edwards and other residents 30-day notices to pack up and leave the premises.

"We warned them that the new owners would request whoever is there at the time of the purchase not to be there. I can't control what the new owners want to do," Urgo said. "They want to remodel the bathrooms and rooms and don't want guests there at the time."

Forced to look for a place to live, Edwards' mom, Sarah Bowman, said they are on a waiting list for Bad River housing. A family friend has offered them a place to



Bowman

stay until they find a place of their own.

"I was No. 9 on the list last year. I'm not sure how fast that list moves," Bowman said, smoking a cigarette outside her apartment as snow whipped in off the lake. "(The winter) is not a good time to be kicked out, but what are you going to do?"

Urgo said it wasn't easy telling residents they had to go. He has operated the motel as transitional housing for a while and is proud to have provided a safe place for struggling people to live.

Though the pandemic has subsided and Ashland's first homeless shelter is up and running, Urgo has had plenty of people coming to him looking for help.

SEE EVICTION • PAGE A5

County cuts funding for La Pointe Police Department

BY **TOM STANKARD**,
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La Pointe residents are losing round-the-clock police service after the Ashland County Board terminated its longstanding funding agreement with the Police Department.

About 25 years ago, the county realized the logistical challenges that come with policing an island with access so far away from Ashland County, La Pointe Administrator Michael Kuchta said.

The county has since been paying La Pointe — \$135,000 per year in recent years — to support the La Pointe Police Department rather than having the sheriff's department patrol the island or investigate minor crimes.

Kuchta said the county made its decision in haste — though it debated the matter for months before voting this month — and said La Pointe's 420 year-round residents will suffer as a result.

"We can only afford to have officers on duty three quarters of the time. We will have two full-time officers and two part-time officers, and seasonal officers during the tourist season," he said.

To fill the void, the town will have to rely on the sheriff's department to provide the same level of patrol, backup and routine coverage the county provides to every other community, he said.

But logistical issues have made fulfilling this duty difficult in the past and have given a glimpse of what it would be like to not have police service around the clock, Kuchta said.

"Last month there was a case when our officer was booking someone into the county jail on the mainland and there was an accident on the island. Dispatch called a deputy to respond, but the deputy refused, I'm guessing because the ferry wasn't running," he said.

Such instances cause Kuchta to believe the county isn't prepared to fulfill its legal responsibility that La Pointe is paying for through county taxes.

"The town of La Pointe in 2023 will be subsidizing just the sheriff's department more than \$375,000. At this point, we are subsidizing them for services we are not receiving," Kuchta said.

Ashland County Chief Deputy and Sheriff-Elect Brian Zupke said he disagreed with the board's decision, but hasn't determined how the department will respond to calls on the island when he is sheriff.



Kuchta

SEE POLICE • PAGE A5

Cable looks to expand, improve airport

BY **RICK OLIVO**,
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Officials at Bayfield County's only paved-runway airport outside of Cable are seeking funding for a bevy of improvements that could help the facility draw more people to the area.

On their wish list: reconstruction or rehabilitation of the terminal building, which dates from the 1940s; work to seal cracks and prevent damage to taxiway pavement and new taxiways; an additional hangar and new lighting for the runway; and installation of guidance system to help pilots land.

They'd also like to have a parking lot for vehicles and snow-removal equipment so they have to rely on the town of Cable to plow out runways after storms.

Airport Commission Chairman Douglas Rowe said the most pressing need doesn't involve buying



Cable Union Airport commissioners Doug Rowe, left, and Kelly Nelson on the airport's main runway. The commission is seeking federal and state funds to rebuild and expand the facility. (Rick Olivo/staff photo)

equipment or expensive renovations.

"There are a lot of trees that are starting to grow up. Some of them are white pines, and they aren't going to

stop growing," he said. Those trees need to be cut back before they encroach on the runway and taxiways.

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Ashland County is ending its longstanding agreement to subsidize the La Pointe Police Department, meaning the town will have to cut back on 24-7 police protection, Administrator Michael Kuchta said. (Contributed photo)

» **POLICE**
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“I didn’t want it to come to this point,” he said.

As the county deals with a tight budget, money that would have gone to La Pointe will be used to recruit and retain officers at the Ashland County Jail, which faces shortages that have forced the county to house

inmates elsewhere.

County Administrator Dan Grady said correction officer pay will be increased by \$2 per hour, from the current \$22.21 an hour.

He said the county had little choice but to end the



Zupke

funding deal.

“The agreement is unprecedented. It doesn’t happen anywhere else,” Grady said. “(The county) has its own budget issues. We don’t have the money to do what we want.”

Zupke plans to meet with La Pointe officials and discuss how to protect its residents in the future.

Cold as the Dickens



(Contributed photo)

DAILY PRESS

BY ASHLAND

Actors perform in the Stage North Groundlings’ outdoor production of “Dickens on the Deck.” Shows will

continue at 7 p.m. Thursday Dec. 15, Friday Dec. 16 and Saturday Dec. 17, and viewers can watch from the comfort of their cars with radios tuned to 96.1 to hear the actors, or sit by a

Solar advocates hope state allows more third-party financing

BY DANIELLE KAEDING
Wisconsin Public Radio

Solar advocates hope a recent decision by Wisconsin utility regulators will lead to more proposals to use a financing tool that makes it more affordable for homeowners, schools and businesses to install rooftop solar.

The Public Service Commission voted 2-1 this month to approve Vote Solar’s request to allow third-party financing to install solar on the home of a Stevens Point family. Under the agreement, North Wind Renewable Energy Cooperative will lease the system to the family who will use the electricity. The family’s traditional utility company is Wisconsin Public Service. Advocates say the financing method is like

leasing a vehicle that helps customers afford the upfront costs of installations.

Vote Solar filed a petition in late May with utility regulators. The groups wanted regulators to clarify the financing tool is legal after multiple court challenges and lawmakers have left the matter unsettled.

Utilities have argued that selling power to the public makes solar installers a public utility, and they should be treated as such. But solar advocates argue projects like the Stevens Point installation only serve one family or customer. The commission agreed the project doesn’t sell power to the public.

“What is likely to happen is that there will be more proposals of that nature coming forward, and it’s up to the

utility to decide to accept it or take it to the commission,” said Michael Vickerman, policy director for RENEW Wisconsin.

Vickerman and other solar advocates, including Vote Solar, say the commission’s decision is an important step, but regulators did not grant approval of all such financing arrangements. They say it’s vital to make third-party financing available for all in Wisconsin.

“We’re thrilled to see the commission make the right choice for this family, and hope the state will continue to build on this momentum by affirming that third-party financing is an option for all Wisconsinites,” Will Kenworthy, Vote Solar’s Midwest Regional Director, said in a statement after the ruling.

The law defines a public util-

ity as any entity that provides “heat, light, water or power either directly or indirectly to or for the public.”

Some utilities and labor groups, including the Wisconsin Utilities Association and Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, have opposed efforts to declare that solar installers are not public utilities under the law. The Wisconsin Utilities Association has argued that selling power through an unlimited number of such systems to an unlimited number of customers would make the seller a public utility.

Utilities owned by Milwaukee-based WEC Energy Group, including WPS and We Energies, say they’re disappointed in the ruling. They argue unregulated rooftop solar developers are pushing the

issue to skirt regulation and the Legislature.

“These types of financing arrangements, we believe, are illegal under state law, and also they harm our customers by shifting additional costs from the people who want and can afford to own solar to the people who don’t want and can’t afford solar,” said Brendan Conway, WEC Energy spokesperson.

Conway said customers who are getting power from solar systems don’t need to buy as much electricity from the utility. As they require less power, he said they’re paying less of the cost to distribute electricity on its system. The Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association shares similar concerns, according to Rob Richard, director of government relations.

» **AIRPORT**
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Rowe said the airport has submitted a funding request to the state Department of Transportation in hopes that federal and state aid could pay for many of the improvements.

Rowe said it’s fairly unusual for a small, unincorporated community like Cable to have an airport, but he said the facility is well worth the \$8,500 that the county and towns of Cable, Drummond and Namakagon invest every year to keep it operating.

The Federal Aviation Administration says the airport, with its north-south 3,709-foot asphalt runway and its crossing east-west 2,194-foot-long turf runway, had 5,510 flight operations in 2021, 54% of which involved non-local pilots. Rowe said a total of 10 aircraft call the airport home, and other pilots would house planes there if more hangars are built.

If the requests — funding requests are due every six years — are approved, the federal



Joe Hickey of Milwaukee is a frequent visitor to Cable, flying in and out several times a year to visit and hunt grouse. (Photo contributed by Joe Hickey)

government would 90% of the costs, with the state picking up an additional 5% and locals covering the remaining 5%. But Rowe doesn’t expect all to be approved.

“It’s a long list of things we need to have done at the airport, and we need to prioritize them,” Rowe said.

Airport Commission member Kelly Nelson

said the money would help ensure the long-term viability of the airport.

“There are some infrastructure projects here that have not been addressed over the years because of the difficulty in getting funding,” he said. “Some of these things are items that have not been addressed in the past, but it is time.”

A top priority is reconstruction or replacement of the terminal building, which is “in disrepair and needs an upgrade,” Nelson said.

The airport opened as a public landing strip in 1946, but its history really began in 1949 when Carl and Libby Parod left Chicago to take over operation of the facility. Carl died in 1959 and Libby, who lived at a small house on the airport grounds, continued operating it until her death in 2005. She was named to the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame in 1995.

Today, the airport’s terminal is the same small,

wood-framed building that she and Carl lived in for many years.

“She’s an institution around here for sure,” Rowe said.

Nelson said the airport helps bring tourism money to the county and is busy all summer.

“There are charter flights that drop people off who have second homes or cabins, and there are a lot of visitors,” he said. “And having an airport available is also good for businesses in the area.”

The airport also hosts pancake breakfasts and burger night fly-ins twice a year, attracting up to 40 aircraft for each event.

Cable Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Heather Ludzack said the area definitely depends on the facility.

“It’s unusual for such a small community to have an airport and it’s a great addition to Cable, because it gives another opportunity for travel to the area,” she said.



Ludzack

“We have people fly up from Milwaukee just for the weekend. They come up just to dine in our restaurants, to stay at our lodging or golf at our golf course. It is a great amenity for a small community.”

She said the facility also serves medical flights and business travel.

Pilot Joe Hickey of Milwaukee, for example, began flying to Cable to go grouse hunting and has been using the airport for 35 years.

“It’s really a gift, a blessing. It allows me to fly up there. I can be at my home in time for dinner,” he said.

Hickey participates in the Angel Flight program, flying medical patients to locations such as the Mayo Clinic. He said he often makes a quick visit to Cable on his way home from those travels.

“I also bring a lot of friends up who hunt with me or visit in the summer,” he said. “It’s been a big part of my life. I’ve spent half my life flying up there.”

» **EVICTION**
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They have few other choices; the homeless shelter also gets several calls a day from people looking for a place to stay and typically, all 21 rooms are occupied — as they were in early December.

Urgo wants to move on from the motel because his health

makes running the place difficult, but he wants to continue helping residents by helping them find new quarters.

“We have reached out to landlords to see what they have and (we’re) giving positive recommendations. We want to assist in any way,” he said. “It’s troubling situation.”

As the Bay Area continues to

deal with its housing crisis, it’s hard to find any vacancies at all — much less at affordable prices, Urgo said.

“We don’t want to be out under these circumstances. But there just isn’t enough housing for people to live. We hope the Ashland community will rally together to give these people a chance,” he said.

Urgo hopes a 50-unit housing development being constructed by Commonwealth Development on Ashland’s east side will help.

Each unit will house 10 apartments with rent based on income, with a one-bedroom starting around \$300 per month and a three-bedroom at about \$1,100 a month.

But construction of the first isn’t expected until summer, leaving Bayview residents searching as winter’s coldest days approach.

Currently third on the housing list, Edwards said it might be a while until something opens up.

“I expect it to be about a couple months,” he said.