



Rock on!
Local bands play fundraiser for student musicians, **A3**

Cardinals soar:
South Shore girls sit atop conference, **B1**



Ashland Daily Press

ASHLANDDAILYPRESS.NET

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2023

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MAILING LABEL ONLY



David Fulweber, Xcel Energy Bay Front Power Plant's general operations manager, next to one of the plant's two remaining and functional turbine-generators. (Peter J. Wasson/Staff photo)

The home fires keep burning

How Ashland plant fits Xcel's carbon-free plan

BY **PETER J. WASSON**
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The trucks never stop. Every day, all day and all night, they stream into Ashland's Bay Front Power Plant, delivering loads of shredded bark, wood chips and even retired railroad ties — 250,000 tons of it every year.

All that wood waste — biomass, in industry terms — fuels boilers that create power for about 27,000 homes and provides a living for the 33 Bay-Area employees who work there.

So 24/7/365, wood is fed onto conveyer belts that contribute to the cacophony of noise in the plant — roaring flames in the boilers, hissing steam through pipes, and the endless, whirring vibration of turbines and generators that rest atop enormous springs so they don't shake



Gauges near the turbines keep track of operating temperatures and generator output. (Peter J. Wasson/Staff photo)

themselves apart. The plant's owner, Xcel Energy, announced plans earlier this year to quit burning coal by 2030 and be entirely carbon-neutral by 2050 — and wood waste is most definitely carbon-based fuel.

SEE XCEL • PAGE A5

La Pointe files to reclaim \$375K police payment

BY **PETER J. WASSON**
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The town of La Pointe has taken preliminary measures to sue Ashland County in an attempt to prevent the county from cutting its subsidies to the town police department.

County Board members in November voted to end the county's 27-year agreement with La Pointe in which it provided \$135,000 a year to help the town afford round-the-clock police protection for its 420 year-round residents.

The town says in a claim notice filed with the county — a necessary step before filing suit — that residents will have to pay additional taxes to make up for the lost revenue and pay patrol officers.

The claim says counties are required to provide town residents with police protection, but Ashland County Sheriff Brian Zupke told the town board at its December meeting that he does not have the resources to staff the town. La Pointe, on Madeline Island, is 20 miles and a ferry ride from the nearest Ashland County road.

Zupke on Wednesday declined to comment on the matter, saying he wouldn't speak to the Daily Press because the newspaper reported during his campaign that he was living in Bayfield County.



County Administrator Dan Grady also declined to comment, saying he hadn't had a chance to discuss the claim with the county's lawyers.

At the time of the county vote, La Pointe Administrator Michael Kuchta said the decision was short-sighted and that the town would no longer be able to provide 24/7 police coverage without the money.

The county, in turn, said it needs the \$375,000 to increase pay for jail staff by \$2 an hour as it struggles to fill positions.

"I have heard that's what they intended to use part of the money for," Kuchta said. "The reality is they as a county are required to provide equal levels of law enforcement service across the county. For the last 20-plus years they have achieved that in La Pointe by purchasing services from our police department."

"The reality is the county is not living up to its legal obligations," he said. "They are taxing us for services we are not receiving and haven't negotiated to find another resolution."



SEE LA POINTE • PAGE A6

Ashland duo leads charge on student mental health

BY **TOM STANKARD**
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Ashland High School students Paula Van Vlack and Alyssa Denasha have struggled with mental health in some way their entire lives.

Going to school during stressful times has only made things more difficult. Even under the best of circumstances, schools can harbor bullies and critics, and the pandemic added even more tumult to students' lives.

Like most kids, freshman Van Vlack and Denasha, a senior, were reluctant to disclose their struggles, for fear of being ridiculed by classmates or ignored by adults. But now they're coming out, and encouraging other students to open up as well so they can help one another overcome mental stresses.

Both girls have been selected by school administrators to join peers from across the country in the Centers For Disease Control's



Ashland High School students Paula Van Vlack and Alyssa Denasha are part of a nationwide initiative helping kids deal with mental health struggles. They will speak this month to the entire school board. (Tom Stankard/Staff photo)

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child initiative. The effort involves students working with education leaders and

health professionals to improve students' mental development.

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(USPS/340-240)



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COMMUNITY

Obituaries are due: Noon on Friday for Tuesday edition & Noon on Wednesday for Friday edition
obits@ashlanddailypress.net • Obituaries must be paid before they can run.

» LA POINTE

FROM PAGE A1

The La Pointe claim cites the county's own statistics in making its case. County deputies responded to Mellen, another town with its own police force, 981 times in 2021 and 2022, the claim says.

Deputies only responded to La Pointe once during that time. Kuchta said La Pointe expects the same patrols, emergency response and backup to local officers as the county provides every other community in the county.

"Mellen gets more service in one day than La Pointe gets in one year," Kuchta said. "The county's

claim that La Pointe taxpayers get the same level of service is blatantly false."

La Pointe represents 2.7% of Ashland County's population, but provides 21% of the county's property-tax revenue, the claim says. The \$375,000 that La Pointe taxpayers send to the sheriff's department is more than Mellen pays to support all county departments combined, the town argues.

La Pointe on Wednesday formally told the county that the town and individual property owners will pursue a financial claim to have the \$375,000 returned to La Pointe. A formal claim will be filed by March

15, the town said.

Kuchta said the matter never should have gotten that far.

"At this point, our goal is to obtain the funding so we can provide 24/7 coverage in La Pointe without going into debt or having property owners pay even more than they do now," he said.

Glenn Carlson, La Pointe town chairman, echoed those sentiments.

"We need to guarantee adequate police coverage for our community," he said. "We can't do that if we're forced to pay \$375,000 to the county for services they are legally required to provide, but don't."



The town of La Pointe is preparing to sue Ashland County over the county's decision to end its years-long practice of subsidizing the town police department. Town Administrator Michael Kuchta said the county is obligated by law to provide the town with the same police services it offers every other town. (Contributed photo)

OBITUARIES

John Johanning

September 18, 1955 - December 17, 2022

John Johanning, 67, passed away December 17, 2022 in Duluth, Minnesota.

John was born on September 18, 1955 in Fort Atkinson before moving to Janesville, Wisconsin. He graduated from Janesville Craig High School in 1973. John studied at UW-Whitewater, then the University of Minnesota where he earned a degree in animal science. Drawn to the Great Lake, he relocated in the 80s to the shores of Lake Superior.

For decades John owned his own business, JJ's Carpentry. Later he began Let it Shine Energy Services as an early proponent of alternative energy in the area. He was a Master Captain occasionally working day sailing charters. Additionally, John taught renewable energy at Indianhead Technical College.

John was a lover of the outdoors and would, given the choice, prefer to sleep out under the stars. He enjoyed many activities including hiking, biking, skiing, boating, and soaring. He loved all animals including the many dogs and cats he gave a home to over the years. John loved music and had many talents including wood working, boat building and anything mechanical. He will be remembered for his great sense of humor and as a kind and loving spirit who would always be there to help a friend or stranger in need.

John was preceded in death by his parents Phyllis Johnson and Don Johanning. He is survived by brother Dan Johanning of Irving, TX; his former wife and dear friend Carolyn Ridgway of Minneapolis, MN; his Aunts and Uncles: Chuck and Rita Johanning of Kronenwetter, WI; Sue Johanning of Milwaukee, WI; Charlie Johnson of Columbus, WI; Francoise Johnson of Wisconsin Dells, WI and many beloved cousins.

A celebration of life will be held this summer in the Chequamegon Bay area. The Cremation Society of Minnesota is helping with arrangements.

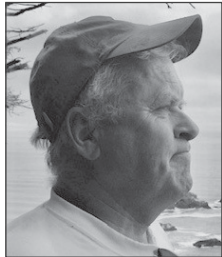
Judy Diane Kontny

April 4, 1947 - December 21, 2022

Judy Diane Kontny, 75, passed away at Lakeland Regional Medical Center on Wednesday, December 21st, 2022 of pneumonia due to her battle with cancer. Judy was born in Racine, Wisconsin on April 4th, 1947 to Anton Jordan and Grace Mours. Judy was a graduate of Racine High School. Judy married Warren (Butch) Kontny August 27th 1966. They resided in Ashland, Wisconsin until moving to Lakeland, Florida in 1981. She had three children Jill Bella, Todd Kontny (Melissa), Scott Kontny (Krista) and 6 Grandchildren Cade, Peyton, Taylor, Gianna, Colby, Chloe. Warren (Butch) preceded her death in 2010.

Judy worked at Q&Q as President and owner and was known as Ms. Judy to all the employees. She was also active in PHCC as Auxiliary Director and also Women's Auxiliary President for the FAPHCC.

Judy was the most selfless person and always generous and kind. Her focus was spending time with her family, friends and grandkids she was loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend, she will be missed by all. We will have a celebration of life in Ashland, Wisconsin at a later date.



Lauretta M. Nix

August 12, 1934 - January 9, 2023

Lauretta M. Nix, aged 88, of Mellen, WI passed away Monday, January 9, 2023 at Park Manor Nursing Home in Park Falls, WI. She was born on Aug 12, 1934 in Downing, WI to Clebourn and Iola (Grim) Benner.

On March 17, 1954 she married her husband of 68 years, Jerome L. Nix in Brackett, WI. They farmed in Highbridge for over 20 years before Lauretta worked at Memorial Medical Center in Ashland in the purchasing department for over another 20 years. She loved spending time with her family, being a 4-H Leader, traveling, camping, upholstery, crocheting, and baking in addition to reading in her spare time.

Survivors include her husband, Jerome, of Mellen, WI; sons: John, of Hurley, WI, Donald (Becky) of Custer, WI; grandchildren: Jennifer (Gavin) McGerard, Travis (Mindy) Nix, Robert Trimble, Kelsey Nix, & Bailey Nix; great-grandson, Steven; siblings: Lloyd (Lorraine) Benner of Chippewa Falls, WI, Marley Bischoff of Eau Claire, WI, & Gail (James) Olson of Fairchild, WI; Sisters-in-law: Cathy, Nan, and Mary, as well as nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents, three brothers: Arlyn, Dick, and Dale; four daughters: Carol, Julie, Jeanette, and Mary; and brother-in-law Marvin.

A funeral service for Lauretta will be held at 11:00 AM on Monday, January 16, 2023 at the Congregational United Church of Christ in Mellen with Pastor Donald Quigly officiating.

Visitation will begin at 10:00 AM on Monday at the church in Mellen and will continue until the hour of service.

Spring internment will take place in the Mount Hope Cemetery, Highbridge, WI.

Online condolences for Lauretta's family may be left at MountainFuneralHomes.com.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the Mountain Funeral Home and Cremation Services of Mellen and Ashland, WI.



Ellen Marie Gregoire

October 9, 1950 - December 30, 2022

Ellen Marie Gregoire, age 72, of Ashland, passed away Friday, December 30, 2022 at her residence. She was born October 9, 1950, in Ashland, the daughter of Peter and Dorothy (Rogers) Leciejewski.

In 1968, she graduated from Ashland High School. On January 17, 1970, she married Richard Gregoire, in Ashland. Ellen worked many years as a seamstress for Munsingwear, Micros, and Anna Marie Designs, in Ashland. Prior to her retirement in 2019, she worked in linen and materials at Memorial Medical Center, in Ashland. She was a member of Salem Baptist Church, in Ashland. Ellen enjoyed going to Lake Superior and on car rides. She loved being with her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Ellen and her sisters shared a very special bond.

She is survived by her husband, Richard; three children, Julie Ann (Kenneth) Mackey, Kim Sue (Brian) Lampson, and Vickie Lynn (Jerry Bourgard) Gregoire; fifteen grandchildren, Ryan (Mallory) Mackey, Christopher (Shannon) Mackey, Morgan (Andrew) Nadke, Keisha Gregoire, Kelsie (DeJay) Jarecki, Andrew (Maren) Mackey, Amber (Thomas Schumacher) Sajdak, Matthew (Ella Slager) Mackey, Karinna (Mike) Nemecek, Klaudia Swanson, John (Chaselyn Currier) Swanson, Hannah Lampson, Izabelle Lampson, Hailey Bourgard, and Jeffrey Bourgard; eleven great-grandchildren, McKenzie, Keegan, Madelyn, Raelyn, Wynter, Gracelynn, Landon, Aiyanna, Owen, Wheeler, and Michael; two brothers, Anthony (Susie) Leciejewski and Richard (Rosie) Leciejewski; three sisters, Phyllis (James) Beeksmma, Joyce (Paul) Mullard, and Loretta (Arnold) Horstman; and numerous nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents and a grandson-in-law, Beau Nemecek.

Services were held. A Spring inurnment will take place at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Ashland.

Arrangements are by the Roberts Funeral Home and Ashland Crematory Service, in Ashland.



» HEALTH

FROM PAGE A1

Using the leadership skills that got them selected, Van Vlack and Denasha are helping school districts nationwide learn how to create a space that nurtures students' mental wellbeing, said Greta Blancarte, the Ashland district's wellness coordinator.

The two young women have been attending meetings with mental health experts about what needs to be done and what school leaders should focus on. They are set to meet with Ashland school officials at the Jan. 25 School Board meeting to share what they are learning and set goals for the district.

"Some people just don't understand what mental health truly is," Van Vlack said. "We are working with staff to help them understand more what students need and help students feel more safe with wanting to speak about it."

While some students feel at home in school, it can be a tough place for others and cause great anxiety, the girls said.

"It can really hurt someone's mental health because we have all these expectations that we're expected to follow. And then we feel really bad when we can't," Denasha said.

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't help things, either, turning the world upside down, said Heidi Kahlstorf, a psychotherapist at Memorial Medical Center.

Shifting from virtual learning to going to back to an actual school building was overwhelming for some.

"Coming out of the pandemic, I went from being isolated to being around 700 to 800 students right away and it is overwhelming," Denasha said. "You come here and there's expectations about how you should look, how you should talk and how you should feel. There's a lot of pressure."

All that pressure can make students simply feel lost, Kahlstorf said.

"Some are having a hard time going back to high school. It can cause them to feel like they don't know what to do next," she said.

Mental health issues for a high-schooler don't end in the classroom," Kahlstorf said.

"Back in the day, people passed notes and it wouldn't follow them home. (Today) they bring it home. What is being said online is being taken as the truth. Those same notes are being taken home on their phones now. Some stay up to midnight on their phones," she said.

Pressure to act and look a certain way has gotten so bad that schools in Seattle this month sued social media giants Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat, accusing them of "creating mental health crisis among America's youth."

Harmful content pushed to users includes extreme diet plans, encouragement of self-harm and more, according to the complaint.

All those pressures make it difficult for kids to speak up and seek help — or even discuss their struggles.

"Many students are ashamed or feel scared to open up because they are scared of what their peers or teachers are going to say," Denasha said.

And when students do take a risk and open up, it can backfire.

"I've tried to speak about something to an adult about something and they didn't listen and pull the whole adult card. I feel like that's really what the problem is now," Van Vlack said.

Their experience so far in meetings with mental health experts, school officials and students as part of the CDC's initiative has been just the opposite.

"They were actually listening and asking questions and they were giving us ideas, so it didn't feel like we were being belittled," Denasha said.

Ashland High School Principal Brian Trettin has been listening to what the two students have had to say and is open to their ideas.

"One is having the school do more lessons about what mental health is. Another goal is having more open dialogue in school. We don't want to make mental health seem taboo. The more we talk about it the more comfortable we get with any tough thing," Trettin said.

Kahlstorf said schools that foster an atmosphere in which students are encouraged to discuss their problems are taking the first step toward helping students.

"The more they can contact each other and talk face-to-face about it, the better," she said.

Making students more aware of these issues can encourage them to be more accepting and understanding of one another and create a school where students will not be judged, Trettin hopes.

It all starts with being heard, Denasha said, "I'm hoping when we go to this board meeting, they will listen as much as others have and maybe take some of our ideas, put them into place and try to make school a better place to be for mental health," she said.



Trettin

Ashland Daily Press



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