



FIRE'S OUT

New owner takes over Washburn tavern

A3

BEATING FEET

AHS coach reflects on success of first class

A7



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Washburn residents defend teacher, Queer Prom

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A Washburn Middle School teacher has caused a stir in the community after supporting an LGBTQ+ event using school resources last month.

Danielle Nepstad reportedly spread word about the April 29 Queer Prom by sending a mass email through the school's network, encouraging people to attend the second annual event, a parent told the Daily Press.

Washburn resident Hannah Lende told school board members Thursday and during April's meeting that Nepstad should be disciplined for using school resources to promote a non-sanctioned school event.

"She shouldn't have done that. I want to see some accountability," she said at the April 27 meeting.

"You guys are fools being here. I love that you're here, don't get me wrong, but the foolish part is that policy wasn't followed," she said Thursday.

Superintendent Thomas Wiatr didn't respond to questions regarding discipline Nepstad might face.

More than 50 people in the audience during the Thursday meeting vocally countered Lende, saying they supported both the teacher and LGBTQ+ students.

It was the second such outpouring of community support in as many days for a teacher involved in gay rights. The Ashland School Board earlier in the week renewed the contract of teacher and tennis coach Bob Graf after some parents demanded he be fired, largely for his support of queer students, according to many of the 100 supporters who demonstrated on his behalf.

More **TEACHER** | A5



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The SoundCheq Music Festival will be giving out a limited number of special commemorative SoundCheq guitar picks featuring a QR code that links to a full schedule of events.

SOUND CHEQ RETURNS WITH HOMETGROWN TALENT

CLAIRE DUQUETTE
For The Ashland Daily Press

Music lovers will be treated to an extraordinary weekend of live performances May 26-28 when an expanded third annual SoundCheq Music Festival comes to Washburn. Sponsored and organized by the StageNorth Groundlings, the festival showcases 35 musical acts all based within approximately 40 miles of Washburn.

"I keep saying this, but we have an embarrassment of musical riches in the region," said Groundlings board member and SoundCheq organizer Liz Woodworth.

This year, the number of venues has expanded. Along with the Snug, StageNorth Theater and the Lake

FOR TICKETS AND MORE INFO [SOUND CHEQ MUSIC FEST.COM](https://www.soundcheqmusicfest.com)

\$25 TICKET **35** SHOWS

FRIDAY, MAY 26
SATURDAY, MAY 27
SUNDAY, MAY 28

The SoundCheq Music Festival is back in 2023. The three-day festival features Bay-Area musicians performing at four Washburn venues.

Superior Taphouse at South Shore Brewery, the 211

Martini Bar is opening its doors to the festival.

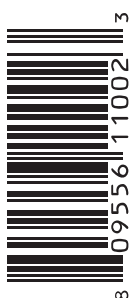
IF YOU GO

The SoundCheq Music Festival will span May 26-28 at four Washburn venues — StageNorth Theater, The Snug, 211 Martini Bar and the Lake Superior Taphouse. Tickets are \$25 for the entire festival or \$10 for a one-day pass. Tickets will be available at the door or can be pre-purchased online at [soundcheqmusicfest.com](https://www.soundcheqmusicfest.com), which includes a full schedule for all 35 acts. There is also a link on the website to sign up as a festival volunteer.

"It's an awesome event for Washburn," said 211 Martini owner David Sneed. "I plan to be here all three days to listen to the music myself."

More **SOUND CHEQ** | A5

MAILING LABEL ONLY



INDEX

- Local news A2-4
- Ashland history/quiz A4
- Talk Around Town A6
- Sports A7-8
- Puzzles A9
- Outdoors A10
- Farm column A15

DEATH NOTICE: A4

Livingston, Eva H.

Warren Nelson and friends to play Harbor View Event Center

Singer-songwriters Warren Nelson and Corey Carlson will re-unite in a concert at the Harbor View Event Center in Washburn at 7:30 on Saturday, May 20. They will be joined by Randy Sabien on fiddle and piano, Ed Willett on cello, Jack Gunderson on bass, Tom Mitchell on drums and Rowan Nelson-Ferris on guitar and banjo.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Carlson and Nelson and Warren met in 1986 when Nelson founded Big Top Chautauqua. Carlson grew up on the hill, hearing the sounds of the Lost Nation String Band with Bruce Bowers and the many

traveling shows that played the tent. His dad Jerry Carlson was a main partner with Nelson and the Chautauqua from day one.

The concert will feature Corey singing his original songs as well as songs from his musical heroes. The band will also perform songs of the Lost Nation

CONSTRUCTION SEASON BEGINS

Construction season has returned in Ashland as crewmembers began working last week on resurfacing Third Street East from Ellis Avenue to Stuntz Avenue.



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

SoundCheq/ from A1

With more venues, more bands are playing — last year 30 participated, and this year there will be 35, — though the weekend and day pass prices are remaining the same.

“People will get more band for their buck,” Woodworth quipped.

The 35 acts feature a breadth of genre and size, from solo acts to bands with five or more pieces. The music ranges from bluegrass to jazz, pop to country, disco to rockabilly and more, with some original work, some covers and some improvisation.

“We’re really proud of the diversity of music,” Woodworth said.

Though the StageNorth Groundlings are best known for their community theater mission, the non-profit wants to support all performing arts, Woodworth said, so a music festival made sense. The first SoundCheq was in 2019, then COVID shuttered the festival until 2022. As the event grows,

Woodworth envisions it becoming a destination-type weekend event, bringing in people from outside the region to appreciate the local music scene.

All the music sets last just over an hour, and are staggered so that theoretically a festival attendee could walk between all four venues and catch at least part of all the acts. This year, festival goers will receive passports that will be stamped for each act. The person turning in the passport with the most acts at the 8 p.m. Sunday festival end party at StageNorth will receive two Golden Ticket passes for the 2024 festival.

Woodworth said the festival needs volunteers to sell and take tickets at each venue — the signup for volunteering is on the festival website — and all volunteers working four hours or more will receive a weekend pass as a thank you.

While a weekend with great weather would be ideal — many of the venues offer outside seating and stages — the festival will go on no matter what.

“It’s going to be great,” Woodworth said.

Teacher/ from A1

On Thursday in Washburn, Sheeva Abeles-Allison, media specialist for the Ashland School District, said she helped organize the first annual PFLAG Queer Prom last year with help from her students in the Gender-Sexuality Alliance and was proud to be a part of this year’s event that took place at Northland College.

“Ninety-two students showed up to celebrate their queer identities. They danced to songs like ‘Momma Mia’ and ‘I Kissed a Girl’ and snacked on pizza, soda and cookies donated by PFLAG, the Northland College Alliance and Coco’s,” Abeles-Allison said.

Support from the community and events like Queer Prom help students experience a safer and more positive school environment, Abeles-Allison said.

Elementary School student Addi “Kai” Warren told board members that the prom offered alternative students a safe place to celebrate.

“It just felt so welcoming and amazing there,” Warren said. “It sounded really cool. I wanted to find people who are like me and part of the LGBTQ+ community. It was a really fun experience, and I want to go again.”

Warren said there are words to express how she feels, but knows some people are afraid to use them.

Washburn resident and PFLAG Board Member Beck Vallez told the board that they weren’t aware there was a word for their gender until after they were an adult.

“I’m non-binary, I didn’t know that word existed until I was almost 30. But when I learned about it, it felt so right,” Vallez said.

Growing up, Vallez recalled not fitting in at school. Events like the Queer Prom would have helped with that.

“I didn’t have the words to describe how I felt, but there were bad words people used,” Vallez said.

Vallez knew there were similar non-binary kids in and outside school. But



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

Sheeva Abeles-Allison, media specialist for the Ashland School District, said Thursday during a Washburn School Board meeting she was proud to be involved in the Queer Prom she helped organize last year. This year’s prom was held April 29, and at least one parent wants a Washburn teacher who supported it to be disciplined.

TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

Washburn Mayor Mary Motiff reads to board members a city proclamation encouraging everyone to be inclusive.



TOM STANKARD/STAFF PHOTO

PFLAG Board Member Beck Vallez reflects on struggles growing up nonbinary, and explains to school board members that events like the Queer Prom are important to LGBTQ+ kids.

Mary Motiff read to School Board members a previously approved proclamation encouraging everyone to be more inclusive.

“The city of Washburn is welcoming and inclusive to all residents and visitors alike,” she said. “(Washburn) will continue to promote an environment that accepts celebrates and appreciates diversity within the community.”

there was no club or event that recognized them.

“So I never went to prom. I avoided it like the plague. Why? It was not for weirdos and outsiders,” they said.

Today’s students don’t have to be outsiders, Vallez said.

“Which is why I’m so glad we have Queer Prom and they can build a community within the school. They have a chance to fit in and be themselves,” Vallez said.

With that message in mind, Washburn Mayor

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