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# THE NORTHWOODS RIVER NEWS

Evers vetoes  
tax cut,  
increases  
school aid

State News, Page 3

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## School district resolves student harassment investigation

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced Thursday that the School District of Rhinelander has entered into a voluntary agreement resolving an investigation involving compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 when responding to harassment based on gender identity.

"OCR's investigation reflects that during the 2021-22 school year, a nonbinary student and their parent reported to the district that students repeatedly mocked and targeted the student during multiple classes, while multiple teachers repeatedly used incorrect pronouns for the student and one teacher removed the student from class on the ground that the teacher could not protect the student from harassment by the other students," the Department of Education reported.

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## NTSB issues final report on 2021 plane crash

Failure to maintain adequate airspeed listed as 'probable cause'

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has issued its final report on the Sept. 28, 2021 plane crash

in the Town of Hiles that killed three men. According to the report, the agency has determined that the "probable cause" of the crash was the pilot's failure to maintain adequate airspeed which

caused the airplane to first stall and then spin.

The plane, a twin-engine Rockwell International 690B Turbo Commander, took off from the Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport at approxi-

mately 8:50 a.m. Sept. 28 and crashed approximately 10 minutes later in a swampy area 10 miles east of Eagle River.

See **Crash**. . . page 5



TREVOR GREENE/LAKELAND TIMES

## HARDY AT HODAG

Country music star Hardy closes out the main stage performances at the 45th annual Hodag Country Music Festival Saturday, July 8, 2023. Hardy headlined the four-day festival which concluded Sunday evening in Pine Lake.

## Machine falls off truck, damages Kemp Street

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS NEWS

In a summer of detours in Rhinelander, a city street fell victim to a mishap Thursday afternoon requiring a temporary redirection of traffic.

According to city public works director Randy Myrum, a machine called a lull or lift, which he described as an oversize forklift, fell off an Intercon truck trailer and landed upside down, causing damage to Kemp Street.

The intersection of Kemp and Arbutus was closed to traffic from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. while workers returned the machine to upright position and temporarily patched up the road.

See **Kemp**. . . page 4



HEATHER SCHAEFER/RIVER NEWS

The Rhinelander Fire Department, Rhinelander Police Department and members of the city's street department responded to Kemp Street Thursday afternoon, July 6, 2023, after a machine called a lull fell off a trailer, scarring the road.



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## St. Germain

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“Obviously, this isn’t as big a number to try to come up with,” Christensen said. “The red brick was half a million dollars to do anything with.”

He said the Northwoods Lions Club and the St. Germain Lions Club have indicated interest in the project. There are also some residents “who have said they’d be interested in writing a check.”

“Maybe we’ll get enough donations that we’ll get it done,” Christensen said, noting that depending on what’s ultimately decided, the cost might not be as much as the estimates received to this point. “Maybe we (the town) will put some room tax money in or (money) from some other fund that we have that’s not generated by property tax dollars,” he said.

One other item of concern, Christensen said, is if one of the native American Indian tribes might be offended if the statue was returned to the front of the chamber at some point.

“It would be a shame to spend \$27,000 on it and be told we have to take it down,” he said.

Christensen said St. Germain resident Larry Chamberlain contacted Teresa Mitchell at the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum & Cultural Center in Lac du Flambeau.

He said Mitchell told him that the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians “would have no objections” to the existing statue being refurbished and maintained “in recognition of the St. Germain family’s historical significance to the area.”

According to the website RoadsideArchitecture.com “there never really was a Chief St. Germain.”

“This statue was built as a tribute to the town’s Indian heritage and the St. Germain family,” a post on the website reads.

As far as the statue’s history of attracting visitors — and while there hasn’t yet been a discussion at the town board level about using some room tax money to possibly contribute to the cause — Christensen acknowledged the Chief St. Germain statue “is a tourist attraction.”

“People are over there all the time taking pictures,” he said.

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## Crash

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The three occupants — Mike Dickens, 28, and Dominik Faciano, 23, both of Missouri, and Joseph Johnson, 28, of Florida — were killed.

Their mission was to obtain aerial imagery of forest vegetation for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, according to the NTSB report.

As the report details, after takeoff the plane leveled off at an altitude of about 16,100 feet and accelerated to a maximum recorded groundspeed of 209 knots.

“Less than 2 minutes later, the groundspeed decreased to about 93 knots, and the airplane descended about 500 ft while on a steady heading,” the report states. “The airplane subsequently entered a rapid descent and a right turn, and ‘mayday, mayday, mayday’ and ‘we’re in a spin’ transmissions were broadcast to air traffic control (ATC). A witness, who was located near the accident site, noticed the airplane nose down at high rate of speed and then saw the airplane spinning rapidly about its longitudinal axis. The airplane wreckage was located in remote wetlands and wooded terrain.”

There were no discernible mechanical malfunctions or failures, the investigators concluded.

“All major components of the airplane were located at the accident site,” the report states. “Examination of the airframe, engines, and propellers revealed no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures that would have precluded normal operation.”

According to the report “when the airplane pitched down, the normal load factor decreased rapidly from about 1.6 to less than 1G.”

“A rapid decrease in normal load factor is consistent with a stall when the wing exceeds its critical angle of attack,” the investigators explained.

“At that point, the air flow becomes separated at the wing, and the wing can no longer generate the necessary lift. If the airplane is in uncoordinated flight at the stall, a spin can result. Thus, the pilot likely did not maintain adequate airspeed, causing the airplane to exceed its critical angle of attack and enter a stall and spin,” they concluded.

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## SDR

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“In addition, OCR reviewed evidence that students bumped the harassed student in the hallways and called the student a derogatory slur for LGBTQI+ people. Ultimately, the district responded to these allegations of harassment by changing the student’s schedule to attend school in-person for only three classes and to take additional classes through self-directed study. Based on the evidence in the investigation to date, OCR is concerned that the district response to the persistent harassment limited the student’s participation in school activities. Additionally, the information produced in the investigation does not reflect the district taking steps to ensure the student’s equal access to education with their peers.”

According to the report, OCR is also concerned that the district records miscoded sex-based harassment, including the use of a slur for LGBTQI+ people, as ‘peer mistreatment’; did not document the multiple complaints of sex-based harassment brought by the student and their parent; and did not adequately document the district’s responses. Moreover,

the district’s Title IX coordinator reported that she was unaware of reports of sex-based harassment of the student until after the complainant filed with OCR and therefore had not coordinated a response consistent with Title IX.”

“Congress promises every student a right to fully participate in educational programs without harassment based on sex,” noted Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Catherine E. Lhamon. “Rhineland School District has now committed to take steps to ensure that promise of equal access to education for all its students.”

The school district’s commitments in the voluntary resolution agreement include:

- Evaluating whether compensatory services or other services are necessary for the harassed student due to the instructional time the student missed when attending in-person classes on an only part-time basis.

- Providing training to all district administrators and staff regarding the district’s obligation, in compliance with Title IX, to respond to complaints of sex-based harassment.

- Providing age-appropriate information programs for students to address sex-based harassment, including what

students should do if they believe they or other students have experienced such harassment. And,

- Conducting a climate survey to assess the prevalence of sex-based harassment and obtain suggestions for effective ways to address harassment.

In response to an inquiry from the *River News* regarding the investigation, district superintendent Eric Burke stressed that the complaint was lodged in 2021 and the student in question is no longer enrolled in the district.

“We continuously provide training to our students and staff, so agreeing to provide more training (on discrimination, harassment and bullying) was a commitment we have already embraced,” Burke added. “The District is committed to providing a safe environment for all students.”

Through the resolution agreement the District committed to providing a benefit to all students instead of fighting over the merit of the allegations in the complaint, he added.

The Department of Education did not identify any of the students and teachers involved.

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## Aging

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“Simply, there are not enough people living in Wisconsin to fill all the available jobs now and in the future,” the WMC press release states. “As the report explains, Wisconsin must attract more people into its borders because the state is not naturally growing the population needed to match the economic growth.”

According to the WMC Foundation’s report, the state’s population has decreased by approximately 1,200 people over the last three years due to more people dying than being born, as well as more than 11,000 people moving out of the state at the same time.

The one “bright spot,” the report notes, is that the state gained 11,500 people due to international migration those three years from 2020 to 2022.

After noting the state’s labor force participation rate is at a “historic low” of 64.5 percent, WMC listed six recommendations for lawmakers to consider in order to “attract and retain a talented workforce.”

WMC’s recommendations included improving the state’s tax climate, expanding education opportunities, committing to attracting talent, reform the state’s welfare and unemployment programs, create incentives for businesses who offer employer-based childcare and “remove bureaucratic barriers to entry for individuals not currently in the workforce.”

Krystal Westfahl, the executive director of the Let’s Minocqua Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, acknowledged the challenges that come with an aging population.

There’s no question the area needs to attract young, talented professionals, and Westfahl said she thinks the Lakeland area needs to focus on targeting those who aren’t afraid to live in a tourist-heavy area.

The chamber, she said, aims its marketing at younger people for them to experience the Northwoods. Westfahl said the hope is that some will fall in love with the area enough to “make the move.”

“We’re always encouraging folks to potentially move so that there’s a younger population, with the knowledge that we do have an aging population here,” she said. “It’s been the forefront of our conversations here since I started here almost a decade ago.”

Westfahl said all of the projections she has seen show the local population is steadily increasing in age and not repopulating.

“There weren’t enough young families having kids or the kids weren’t sticking around,” she said. “So we were seeing that local aging population, but then also, people were retiring here ... and so that shift where people were moving here at an older age only put more (strain on the local economy).”

Westfahl is also a member of Minocqua’s subcommittee created last year to identify causes and solutions to the town’s labor and

housing shortages.

While serving on the committee, Westfahl interviewed local high school students and asked them about their plans for the future. Nearly all of them told her they weren’t interested in living or working in the area post-graduation.

“You know, when we’re talking about the housing and labor issue, the aging population is a huge part of that,” Westfahl said. “In all of the studies we were looking at, the aging population issue kept coming up.”

Westfahl called the findings in the WMC report “shocking.” She also said there hasn’t been any indication the current trend will reverse.

“I think it’s an incredibly complex conversation,” she said. “And one piece of the pie is to continue to tell the story to younger generations and encourage them to either move here, or if you grew up here, encourage them to come back and help the community grow. ... So we have to find people who are willing to think outside the box and adapt to the lifestyle that is here.”

Boulder Junction economic and development committee chairman Bill Spear said the aging population is “certainly” part of the committee’s discussions.

The economic and development committee is working to plan for the future of Boulder Junction. It’s hard to attract people to a community and join its workforce when real estate is extremely limited, Spear said.

Westfahl and Spear

both indicated that while there’s a dire need for more workers, communities still need to keep up with providing services to the populations they have now.

One of the most important services that needs to be offered is emergency medical care, a service that’s encountering shortages of its own as well.

Spear pointed to a recent recommendations report created by the Wisconsin Dells-based Strategic Management & Consulting firm for the four towns of Presque Isle, Winchester, Boulder Junction and Manitowish Waters to consolidate their emergency medical service (EMS) departments.

Because of a lack of volunteers, the four towns have begun to work together to create an EMS district to ensure older populations will have reliable emergency medical care.

The report detailed demographics of the four towns.

Unsurprisingly, according to the report, the highest percentage of population for each town are people aged 60-69 and the second highest percentage of population for each town are people aged 70-79.

“Yes, we have an aging population that ... needs a high level of services,” Spear said.

“Like a lot of areas, we certainly have a workforce shortage. And just like Minocqua, one of the biggest issues is really affordable housing.”

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