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MLEC CEO says new headquarters "desperately needed"



The current building housing Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative on Highway 169/210 east of Aitkin.

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative (MLEC) in Aitkin is exploring plans for a new building for their headquarters.

In the May 2020 MLEC *Outlet* newsletter, MLEC CEO Sarah Cron briefly mentioned discussions of a "desperately needed" new

headquarters building with the MLEC board.

Since Cron started at MLEC in January of 2019, employees have expressed the need for a new building. Although the current MLEC headquarters building has undergone several renovations, MLEC's staff, fleet, and technology have outgrown the 1960's facility.

In addition, according to a MLEC press release, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) has advised MLEC that they will be closing the two driveways accessing Highway 169/210, forcing the cooperative to reconfigure the existing driveway/parking area. Wetland constraints will not allow

an expansion to the east of the current property. MLEC leadership views relocating as the best option.

The press release stated that MLEC staff have determined that the cooperative needs a location that allows MLEC to serve the membership effectively while minimizing the cost to each member. In reviewing a new location, MLEC would want a close proximity to the majority of the member density, ready highway access, an easy tie into the existing infrastructure (poles and wires), and close to diesel fueling. Considering outages, maintenance, and construction patterns, the ideal location would be on

Highway 169 close to Highway 18. With 550,000 acres (51%) of Aitkin County being jurisdictional wetlands, there are not a lot of parcels that meet the requirements.

Recently, a piece of property became available, and MLEC made an offer on the property contingent on obtaining a conditional use permit by the County, and getting MNDOT to authorize a driveway move – two very challenging asks. As of now, here are the things that are factual about this prospect:

- MLEC has not finalized the purchase of the land.
- The land is not zoned commercial and must go through a conditional use permitting process prior to the purchase of and acquisition of land.
- A rough sketch of a potential option of what a development of land could look like was submitted to the county, per the conditional use permitting process. MLEC has not met with an architect or drawn up plans. All of those things will depend on what type of property MLEC is able to secure.
- The cooperative has not discussed this openly

because no land has been purchased and MLEC leadership felt the current property owners deserved their privacy.

• MLEC is currently borrowing just above 1% interest and will likely never see money that low again. The difference between starting to plan and act now and waiting until interest rates go back up to 4 – 5% could add \$5 to \$10 million to the cost of a construction loan. In MLEC's upcoming strategic financial planning session, the Board of Directors and management team will discuss land, building, and financing options to see what the long-term financial implications to the cooperative and our members could be.

• If MLEC does not obtain a conditional use permit, the land will not be purchased, and MLEC will continue to look for another piece of property.

The MLEC press release stated that MLEC does take the principle of Democratic Member Control very seriously and when there is concrete information about future plans, MLEC will update the public.

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MLEC CEO Sarah Cron



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Positive COVID-19 cases

Brainerd High School students reverted back to distance learning on Sept. 24, after Brainerd Public Schools announced “students in grades 9-12 encountered a proven and growing cluster of positive COVID-19 cases.”

Brainerd Public Schools Communications Manager Karla Sand issued a press release on Sept. 22, informing the public that “high school classes in grades 9-12 at Brainerd High School, Lincoln Education Center, and Brainerd Learning Center will be canceled for Wednesday, September 23. This will allow teachers to prepare for full-time distance learning.”

“On Thursday, September 24 high school classes at BHS, LEC, and BLC will be ‘reset’ into a distance learning model for two weeks. Teachers and students will follow the hybrid learning bell schedule. During the two

week reset there will be no high school athletic practices or competitions. Students will return in the hybrid model with B-group students on Thursday, Oct. 8.”

COVID CASPER Study

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) targeted Crow Wing County collecting data for the COVID Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response, or CASPER study in four areas in the county: two in Brainerd, one in Crosslake, and one in Nisswa on Thursday, Sept. 24 through Saturday, Sept. 26.

The team conducted interviews and took blood and nasal swap samples. Participation was voluntary. Team members are public health workers with face masks, vest and nametags. For more information: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/casper.html>

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Rollin' on the Range — Growth and changes in Cuyuna County Part Two



The Range is Rollin' with artistic murals which preserve tradition and history. Ann Schwartz photo.

By ANN SCHWARTZ
Downtown Crosby has gone through a couple of evolutions in the last 30 years or so. In the early 90s, when mining had left and the area was suffering, it tried to hang onto its traditional downtown — with a five and dime store, department store, two grocery stores and more spaces that mirrored downtowns in small towns all across America in



North County Café is expanding into the former Crosby Crystal Cleaners building. Photo from North County Café's facebook page.

the Twentieth Century.

As people began to commute to work and shopping continued to expand in Brainerd and Baxter, many traditional storefronts closed their doors, to be replaced by a

sprouting up of antique and secondhand stores. Crosby-Ironton became known as a tourist destination for antique and thrift store shopping.

With the development of the Cuyuna Recreation Area

destinations, lodging, artistic installations and eateries that cater to the new bicycle tourists.

North County Café

A fixture of diner home cooking on Crosby's main

street, North County Café is expanding into the building next door formerly Crosby Crystal Cleaners. North County Café remain open for breakfast and lunch during the expansion.



North County Café serves home-style food like their Tuesday Lunch Special Swedish Meatballs.

OBITUARIES

DOMINADOR SORIANO



Dominador Balisi Soriano, 93, of Deerwood died Friday, September 18, 2020 at his home surrounded by his loved ones.

Funeral services will be 11:00 a.m. Monday, September 28, 2020 at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Crosby.

Visitation will be at the Koop Funeral Home in Crosby on Sunday from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a Rosary at 4:00 p.m. and on Monday one hour prior to the service at the church. Burial will be at the Lakewood Cemetery in Crosby.

He was born on January 27, 1927 in Tuguegarao, Cagayan, Philippines. He was the eldest of nine children. As a young boy his father would reprimand him for not paying attention to his studies. It was then he learned the value of education. When he was a sophomore in high school, WWII hit and their houses burnt, which forced them to move to the next town and as if that was not enough, his father was killed. A few years later, he graduated from high school, but his parents could not afford to send him to school, so he looked for a job and became a street foreman which paid for his education. In 1957, he successfully graduated from the Far Eastern University Medical School and eventually moved to Minneapolis, MN. This is where he started his medical career at St. Barnabas Hospital (Hennepin County Medical Center) as a surgical resident. He then moved to St Luke's Hospital (United Hospital) for general practice;

Cuyuna Range Clinic (Cuyuna Regional Medical Center), Willmar State Hospital (Willmar Regional Treatment Center) and Onamia State Hospital (Mille Lacs Health System). In 1994, he officially retired from the clinic and hospital, but continued to work in Ne-la Shing Clinic. He was a member of numerous organizations including Philippine Minnesotan Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, and after 50 years of providing excellent care, love and dedication to his patients, he could not give up his passion and he continued to attend Medical Conventions until last year, at the age of 92. In his younger years, he enjoyed fishing, hunting, and splitting wood for the winter. In his later years, he enjoyed watching politics, and spending time with his family and friends, and most of all, watching his only grandchild learn and grow. He had a genuine interest for everyone he met and was loved and respected by everyone.

He is survived by his wife, Zenaida (Belarmino); son, Mark Jeremy "MJ"; daughter-in-law, Donna (Valera); one grandchild, Marco Joaquin, all of Richfield; brother, Daniel; sister, Zenaida (Tan); first wife, Belen (Flores); many brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces and other relatives and friends.

Preceding him in death are his parents, Domingo and Remedios Soriano; brothers, Domingo Jr., Damaso, Diosdado, and Delfin; and sisters, Dolores and Domitila.

Arrangements were with the Koop Funeral Home of Crosby.

NOREEN SCHNELLER



Noreen June Schneller, 87, of Palisade, died Saturday, September 12, 2020 at her home.

Due to COVID19, a private family Graveside Service will be held in Fleming Cemetery, Fleming Township with a Celebration of Life to be held at a later date.

She was born July 2, 1933 in St. Paul to James and Marie (Andersen) Kehoe. Noreen married Darold Schneller on October 1, 1955 in Virginia. She worked as a Nurses Assistant at both Hastings State Hospital and Anoka State Hospital. Noreen later worked as a Security Guard at Target in Fridley, as a Hostess and later Manager at Roadside in McGregor, as an Aide at Oak Ridge Homes, as a Teacher's Aide at Rippleside Elementary School in Aitkin as well as a Bus Driver and Kitchen Aide. Noreen enjoyed crossword puzzles, cards, scrabble, dice, knitting, crocheting and watching the Twins. Noreen especially enjoyed Wednesday Night "Chicken Night" with her family which was

a family tradition for 19 years. Noreen will be remembered for her wonderful sense of humor.

Noreen is survived by her children: Anthony Schneller of Palisade, Robin (Bill) Pratt of Palisade, Dawn (Eric) Myhra of Brainerd and Suzanne (DuWayne) Fredrickson of McGregor; nine grandchildren: Shanna Pratt, Chelsie Rose, Sabin and Suzanne Myhra, Nathan and Tyler Fredrickson, Lacey Wilkie, Kelly and Jackson Schneller; 10 great-grandchildren, Ellie, Flynn and Will Rose, Darren and Brinlee Fredrickson, Wayne Fredrickson, Valerie, Barrett, Forrest and Konrad Wilkie; sisters, Virginia "Ginny" Schneller of Aitkin and Lynn Diederich of Crosby; several nieces and nephews. Noreen also leaves behind her dear friends from the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses of McGregor.

Noreen is preceded in death by her husband, Darold and her parents and her step-father, Louis Raitor.

Arrangements were with the Sorensen-Root-Thompson Funeral Home and Cremation Service of Aitkin. You may leave online condolences at www.srtfuneral.com.

BRIGID LYNAM



Brigid Rose Lynam, 29, of Crosby died on Tuesday, September 15, 2020.

A private service is being held.

She was born on October 24, 1990 in Fridley to Robert and Patricia (Keeley) Lynam.

Brigid is survived by her parents of Crosby and three children.

Preceding Brigid in death are paternal grandparents, Glenn and Helen Lynam and maternal grandparents, Lambert and Rosalie Keeley (retired owners of Keely Drug in Crosby).

Arrangements are with the Koop Funeral Home in Crosby.

CHRIS HOLM



Chris M. Holm, 54, of Brainerd, died Monday, September 21, 2020 at Essentia Health — St. Joseph's Medical Center.

Celebration of Life will be held 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 10, 2020 at Nelson — Doran Funeral Home in Brainerd.

Chris was born December 16, 1965, in Brainerd, the son of Otis and Sheila (Stensrude) Holm. He is survived by his son, Thomas (Emily Kadlec) Fairbanks; dad, Otis Holm; brother, Craig (Lisa Haberman) Holm; sister, Cindy (Brad) Hanson; nieces and nephews, Nathan and Allison Holm, and Meigan (Eric) Wills; and great-niece and nephew, Olivia and Drake Wills.

He was preceded in death by his mom, Sheila.

RONALD WEBER



Ronald Lyle Weber, 63, of Crosby died in Garrison Township on September 13, 2020.

Funeral services were held Monday, September 21, 2020 at the Koop Funeral Home in Crosby. Burial will be at the Pine Ridge Cemetery in Emily.

He was born on October 24, 1956 in Blue Earth to Lyle and Shirley (Berndt) Weber. Ron was the owner of Weber Construction in Emily and was a medical driver of Almond House in Brainerd.

Ron is survived by his mother, Shirley Weber of Crosby; two sons: Charles (Sarah) Weber of Garrison and Steven Christenson of Waco, TX; five grandchildren; four brothers: Richard (Pam) Weber of Northup, Raymond (Sarah) Weber of Mankato, Philip Weber of Mankato and Daniel Weber of Mapleton; three sisters: Sheryl Thompson of Brainerd, Laurie (Bill) Shields of Blue Earth and Julie Weber of Brainerd.

He is preceded in death by his Father, Lyle Weber.

Arrangements were with the Koop Funeral Home of Crosby.

KNICOLI KEPHART



Knicoli Jean Kephart, 54, of Garrison died Tuesday, September 15, 2020 at Allina United Health Hospital in Saint Paul.

A gathering of friends and family to Celebrate Knicoli's life was held Friday, September 18, 2020 at the Garrison (Jake Regan) Park in Garrison.

She was born March 29, 1966 in Sterling, CO to Keith O. and Shirley E. (Bullock) Kephart. She grew up in Commerce City, Colorado and graduated from Lester Arnold High School. She moved to Garrison and worked many jobs including as a Culinary Chef for different restaurants in the

area. She loved the Holidays, music, and to have a good time with friends and family.

Knicoli is survived by her spouse Mary Jo Flynn; children: Kylee (Robert) Franks of Commerce City, CO; Jeff Kephart (Baili Guse) of Garrison; sister: Richelle Kephart of Commerce City, CO; three grandchildren: D.J., Faith, and Buddy and one on the way; best friend, Luvae; many other special relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents, granddaughter Anastasia Hope, brother Michael Jurgens, and sister Kris Jurgens.

Arrangements were with the Sorensen-Root-Thompson Funeral Home and Cremation Service of Aitkin. You may leave online condolences at www.srtfuneral.com.

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Crow Wing County Commissioners Candidates' debate forum

One emphasizes liberty and freedom from government another has experience and great relationships



Tom Martin, R and J Broadcasting, was the moderator for the Crow Wing County Commissioners Candidates' Debate held at the Community Center in Crosby in Crosby on Sept. 16.

Incumbent Doug Houge and challenger Michael Starry. It was later clarified that Nixon was in the audience and barred from debating, because he lost the primary, but remains a write-in candidate for District 5.

After Tom Martin, moder-



Arlene Jones, write-in challenger to Commissioner Paul Koering in District 1.

tor for the event, announced that Koering had "declined the invitation," Arlene Jones, write-in challenger to Koering, gave her opening statement. She talked of being a farmer, a business owner and an operator of a non-profit. She is the owner of The Farm on St. Mathias, an 80 acre vegetable and destination farm located in Crow Wing Township.

Jones started the first farm to school program in Crow Wing County by working with many

"farmers to gather enough local product to get [them] into our school districts," she said. "That work lead me to co-found and continue to serve as executive director of Sprout MN located in Morrison County. It is a non-profit food hub working with over 100 small family farms in central Minnesota."

Jones said her district is the biggest farming district in Crow Wing County and she knows the district and its farm community. She also holds a state of Minnesota management job which gives her over 20 years of experience in administration.

She then exited the stage and the rest of the debate was between Houge and Starry with the two write-ins in the audience.

Starry said, "Taxation is theft." His closing statement summed up his philosophy. He is for less state and federal government interference and holding the line on taxes.

"I'm a far more hardline kind of guy when it comes to taxes, when it comes to increases, when it comes to liberty, when it comes to the Constitution," Starry said. "I admit, I'll say it outright, I'm extremist, because I believe that the idea of freedom and what we have in this commu-



Crow Wing County Commissioner District 5 challenger Michael Starry.

nity is pretty extreme in other parts of the world. There are always going to be disagreements in the county board, there are going to be disagreements amongst people, that's what happens. It's how you handle it as an adult. I think I've proven myself to be able to overcome all of these things in my lifetime, from drug addiction to homelessness to where I'm at now with a loving family, farm and sitting up in front of all of you having a debate."

"I can say that District 5, from the day I got on to today, has changed dramatically in a good way," said Houge. "And I've been involved firsthand with some of those changes and others I haven't. Kudos to those folks that have been

passionate about some of this change, but we've got a long way to go," Houge said. "I think it helps to get there with experience and knowledge that I've got through the past 13 years."

On different items discussed, Houge talked of cooperating with local and state officials, while Starry advocated limited-government.

They both were pro-recreation, saying the trails and other amenities were good for the area.

In talking about the county budget, Starry was adamant about holding the levy to a zero percent increase each year. Houge noted that the county board did that for several years and the budgeting process is extensive. Over six



Crow Wing County Commissioner District 5 Incumbent Doug Houge.

months, they start with all the requests from departments and then whittle it down, separating sheep from goats or wants from needs. Then they come up with a final budget and levy figure. Houge had the most extensive budgeting experience with the county and his small businesses while Starry has overseen his personal and business department budget.

Starry challenged Houge's budgeting experience with the county. "It sounds like your experience preparing the budget is letting others prepare it," Starry said.

Houge was glad the county could help business survive the pandemic with CARE act dollars while Starry wanted to push back on such things as the mask mandate. Houge said the state, not the county, is pushing the mask mandate. Starry was in favor of challenging the federal and state government on many of the regulations imposed on counties.

The election is on November 3, although absentee voting has begun.

You can watch the debate on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kt-dzRvb2aM> or search Crow Wing County Commissioner Candidate Debate.

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