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Operation Christmas Child spreads Good News and gifts



Shelly Thelen, Church Relations Coordinator for Operation Christmas Child, and Rick Kottke, Aitkin, get ready to load the filled boxes in the trailer. Ann Schwartz photos

By ANN SCHWARTZ
Operation Christmas Child (OCC) is an annual charitable initiative led by Samaritan's Purse, an international Christian organization. The campaign involves people packing shoeboxes with gifts for children in need around the world. These boxes are then distributed to children in over 100 countries, many of whom are living in impoverished or difficult conditions due to poverty, natural disasters, or conflict.

The local area plays a part

in distributing Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to children all across the world. The boxes help to spread a hopeful Christian message of hope and love, as well as providing toys, school supplies and personal care items for impoverished children.

New Life Church in Aitkin is a collection point in the area. Organizers Rick and Ardel Kottke say that they collected over 870 boxes from press time from 10 area churches and five individual families. Churches are

many denominations: Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Community, Alliance, Wesleyan and more.

The journey of a box begins in a home, Sunday school or church group. A box is packed full of toys, school supplies and toiletry items.

Then, the boxes are brought into the donor's local church and amassed there. Last week, during collection week, some churches, such as New Life, serve as collection centers. After churches bring boxes to

Continued on Page 2

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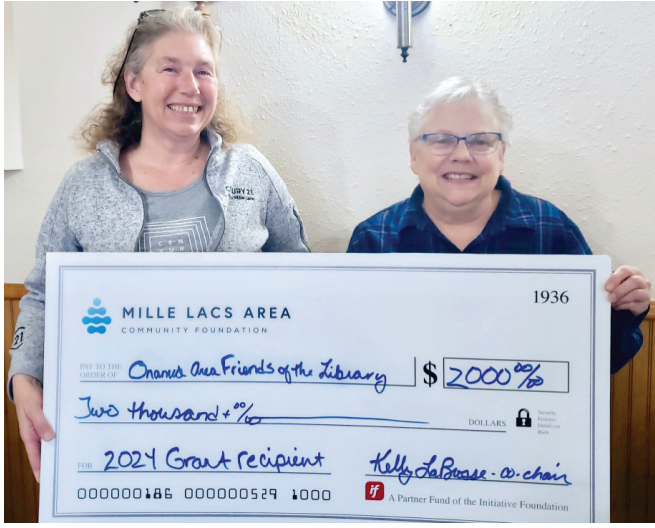
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Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation awards \$4,434 to local nonprofits



Onamia Area Friends of the Library Director Margaret Willis (right) accepts a \$2,000 grant award from MLACF Chairperson Kelly LaBrosse.

The Mille Lacs Area Community Foundation (MLACF) is pleased to announce \$4,434 in grants to two deserving local organizations that continue to make a significant impact in the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Area.

This year's grant recipients are the Onamia Area Friends of the Library and the Family Pathways Onamia Food Shelf, both of which will use the funding to enhance their services and better serve the local community.

Onamia Area Friends of the Library: \$2,000 for energy efficiency and service continuity

The Onamia Area Friends of the Library was awarded \$2,000 for energy efficiency projects and service continuity at the Onamia Depot Library. Founded in 2009 in the refurbished Soo Line Railroad Depot, the Library is free and is open to the public.

Onamia Area Friends of the Library Director Margaret Willis is delighted to share that the grant will improve service to the community. "They are the reason we exist," said Willis.

If you're looking for a new book to read, Willis encourag-

es you to access the library's online card catalog at <https://onamiaarealibrary.com/>. In addition, the library offers community education events and a variety of services to people of all ages.

And don't forget to mark your calendar for the Library's Bake, Book and Stuff sale. It takes place on Saturday, Dec. 7, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Onamia Area Library, 2004 Roosevelt Rd, Onamia. Spoiler Alert: Santa's stopping in for photo opportunities from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Family Pathways Onamia Food Shelf: \$2,434 for refrigeration upgrades

Family Pathways Onamia Food Shelf was awarded \$2,434 for much needed upgrades to refrigeration equipment. Currently housed in a small building with an attached Thrift Store, the Food Shelf is severely challenged for space and fresh and frozen food storage. "This grant provides a beginning to expansion and modernization of the Food Shelf's service to the community," passionately explains Manager Meghan Reed. For more info about the food shelf, visit <http://www.familypathways.org/>.

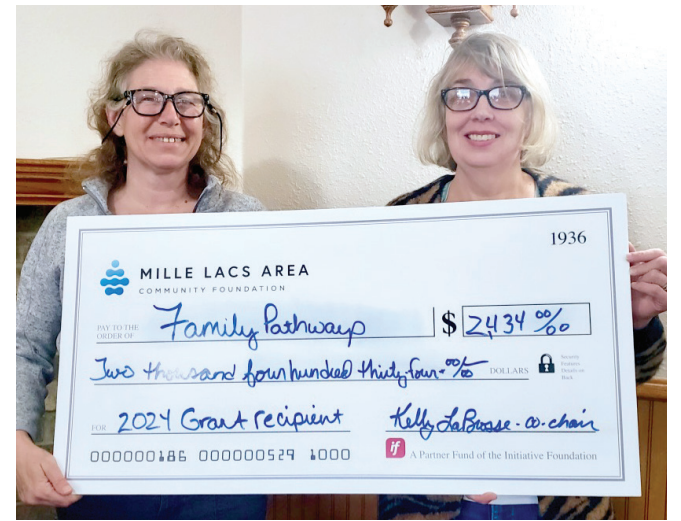
A commitment to community vitality

MLACF Chairperson Kelly LaBrosse expressed her excitement over this year's grants and the positive changes they will bring to the Mille Lacs area. "We are grateful for all the ways our supporters enable us to make a meaningful difference in the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Area," LaBrosse said. "Their financial gifts and volunteerism allow us to fund projects that focus on environmental stewardship, sustainable farming and food programs, economic vitality, and community pride."

Since its inception, the MLACF has awarded \$15,244 in grants to support a range of community initiatives. As a partner fund of the Initiative Foundation, the MLACF continues to help build vibrant communities in the region through grants, donor services, and volunteer efforts.

For more information about the MLACF and its grant programs, or to make a donation, visit www.funds.ifound.org/mlacf. If you're interested in serving on the MLACF Advisory Board, contact Kelly LaBrosse at kalcansell@gmail.com or call 320-469-0368.

The MLACF Advisory Board is a partner fund of the Initiative Foundation and awards grants in the Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Area. Created in 1986, the Initiative Foundation helps people throughout Central Minnesota build a thriving economy, vibrant communities and a lasting culture of generosity. The Foundation serves the 14 counties of Central Minnesota, providing nonprofit grants, business loans, leadership training and an array of donor services. It believes that local people have the greatest sum of initiative, knowledge and relationships to achieve a brighter future.



MLACF Chairperson Kelly LaBrosse (left) awards \$2,434 to Family Pathways Onamia Food Shelf and Thrift Store Manager Meghan Reed.

Author Janet Kurtz

Join author Janet Kurtz at the Brainerd Public Library for a special talk about her new book, *The Heart of My Soul: Tales of Five Generations*.

at the Family Cabin on Monday, Dec. 2 from noon to 1:00 p.m. The event is free.

For more details, call the library at 218-829-5574.

A Christmas Carol comes to Central Lakes College December 4-8

Experience the magic of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol as the Central Lakes College Performing Arts Center presents a bold and inventive retelling of the holiday classic. Performances at the Chalberg Theatre, are on Wednesday - Saturday, December 4-7 at 7



p.m. and Saturday - Sunday, December 7-8 at 2 p.m.

"I'm so please we're able to revisit this production after our first staging in 2022 was cut short due to weather," says Joey Yow, Director of the CLC Performing Arts Center. "This version is an inventive and comic adaptation of the classic story that relies on the creativity and

versatility of our talented cast to portray dozens of beloved characters, often switching roles in an instant."

This adaptation by Patrick Barlow (known for the Broadway and West End hit *The 39 Steps*) brings Dickens' timeless tale to life with just five extraordinary actors.

Using minimal props, dynamic physicality, and the audience's imagination, this adaptation captures the heart and humor of Dickens'

original story while adding a dreamlike quality to Scrooge's journey. From the lovable Tiny Tim to the haunting Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come, audiences will witness the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge in a fresh and engaging way.

"What drew me to this production was its unique style and energy," Yow explains. "There's something truly magical about watching actors

embody multiple characters so seamlessly—it creates an intimate connection with the story and enhances the themes of redemption and community."

Adding to the charm, puppets, masks, and unconventional props play a role in conveying the whimsical and theatrical nature of Barlow's adaptation. The result is a heartfelt, family-friendly performance that invites the audience to see this classic story through a new lens.

The production is directed by Amy Borash, and the talented cast includes Brian

Rhett as Ebenezer Scrooge and Noah Barnhart, Abby Pratt, Kryston Wiseley, and Travis Chaput as the actor ensemble. Wiseley reprises her role from the 2022 production while Rhett, also a cast member in 2022 production, moves from the ensemble into the role of Scrooge.

For more information and tickets can be found by calling the Box Office at 218-855-8199. Don't miss this opportunity to experience an unforgettable theatrical experience that captures the joy and spirit of the holiday season.

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Operation Christmas Child | Continued from Page 1

New Life, boxes are packed into identical brown cartons. Those cartons, in turn, are packed into a trailer in Aitkin. The trailer is brought to a church in Baxter. From there, semi-trailers bring them to Chicago and from there, this region's boxes are shipped all around the world.

"They are on their way to Chicago now," Rick Kottke, Aitkin, said.

Ardel Kottke brings boxes into the New Life Church.

CORRECTION: Correction to report on the front page of November 23, 2024 issue of the NewsHopper "Former Crosby police chief files discrimination lawsuit". The reference to Sheriff Todd Klang should have been Sheriff Eric Klang. We apologize for this error in name reference.

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Electronics Recycling Drive

Looking to clear out your old electronics while making a difference in the community? Mark your calendar for Saturday, December 14, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., when Deerwood Technologies will host an Electronics Recycling Drive to benefit the Deerwood Technologies Scholarship Fund.



For just \$0.60 per pound, you can drop off a wide variety of electronics, including computer towers, monitors, laptops, printers, speakers, cell phones, digital cameras, PDAs, MP3 players, and even small household electronics like razors, hair dryers, and electric brooms. The drive also accepts larger items like VCRs, DVD players, radios, and cable boxes.

Got an old microwave? You can recycle those for a flat fee of \$30. Televisions are also being accepted at a donation rate of \$15 for those under

supporting continuing education for local youth.

For just \$0.60 per pound, you can drop off a wide variety of electronics, including computer towers, monitors, laptops, printers, speakers, cell phones, digital cameras, PDAs, MP3 players, and even small household electronics like razors, hair dryers, and electric brooms. The drive also accepts larger items like VCRs, DVD players, radios, and cable boxes.

27 inches and \$20 for larger models (over 27 inches). Christmas lights can be dropped off for recycling free of charge—a great way to clear out last season's tangled strands and do your part for the planet.

The best part? All electronics collected will be sent to an environmentally safe, U.S.-based recycling facility, ensuring that your discarded items are processed in an eco-friendly way.

Please note: No major appliances (like refrigerators or air conditioners) will be accepted at the drive.

For more information or to find out what items can be recycled, visit www.deertech.com/recycle or email events@deertech.com.

Don't miss out on this chance to declutter, recycle, and make a difference this holiday season!

Art gallery exhibition at CLC

There's still plenty of time to explore the vibrant world of student art at Central Lakes College! The 2-D Design Student Art Exhibition is now on display at the college's Art Gallery, and visitors are invited to see the stunning works created by budding artists. The exhibition opened its doors on Monday, November 25, with a lively reception, and it will remain open through December 19.

Best of all, the exhibition is free and open to the public. It's an opportunity to support local artists while enjoying a diverse range of contemporary 2-D art. The Art Gallery is open from 9 a.m. to 2

p.m., Monday through Friday, offering ample time for community members, art lovers, and students to stop by and experience the show.

Whether you're an art aficionado or simply looking for an inspiring way to spend a few hours, the 2-D Design Student Art Exhibition is a must-see this season.

Don't miss your chance to witness the next generation of artists in action—stop by the Art Gallery before the exhibition wraps up on December 19.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

November

30th - Lions 26 Club raffle tickets for sale with 26 chances to win cash prizes with the top prizes of \$500. Drawing starts at 7 p.m. at the Town Tavern in Ironton. For more info contact Mark Boike at 218-349-2234

December

6th - Tree Lighting Ceremony at Main Street Plaza in Crosby, starting at 5 p.m. with tree lighting, hot chocolate and treats. Organized by the Cuyuna Lakes Chamber of Commerce.

7th - Aitkin County Historical Society Cookie Walk at the museum, 20 Pacific St. SW Aitkin, 9:00 a.m., going until sold out. Cookies are \$8.00 per dozen. Varieties of cookies will be pre-wrapped in 1, 2, 3, and 4 doz. packages. If you would like to pre-order cookies, call 218-927-3348 or email ACHS@aitkincohs.org. Pre-ordered cookies must be picked up by 11:00 a.m. on the day of the sale! Proceeds support the Historical Society.

7th - Bring your camera to the Fifty Lakes City Hall to visit with Santa, enjoy hot chocolate and treats, 3-5 p.m.

14th - Indoor Christmas Market at Deerwood Auditorium, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. Free cookie decorating for youth, coffee, hot chocolate, live music, children's Christmas karaoke, local vendors offering home-made and hand-crafted items. Visit with Santa 9-10 a.m.

14th - Creativity Kit Giveaway 10 a.m. - noon at Crossing Arts, 711 Laurel Street, Brainerd. Creativity Kits are free to the public. Kits are limited. First come, first served. For more information contact Crossing Arts at 218-833-0416, info@crossingarts.org.

14th - Come as you are for a joyous celebration of "The Prince of Peace" presented by the Garrison Alliance Church, 3-4 p.m. There will be music, message, food, beverage, and dessert, starting at 1:30 p.m. Free will offering. Please RSVP by calling 218-838-0164. Located at 9475 Jefferson St., Garrison.

Send your community events to hopper@crosbyironton.net

Sweeten your holiday season

The Aitkin County Historical Society is inviting all cookie lovers to indulge their sweet tooth while supporting a great cause at its popular Cookie Walk, happening Saturday, December 7, at the museum located at 20 Pacific St. SW, Aitkin.

Starting at 9:00 a.m., the Cookie Walk will feature an array of homemade holiday cookies available for purchase, with each dozen priced at just \$8.00. But hurry—cookies are sold on a first-come, first-served basis and the event lasts only until the cookies are gone!

Whether you're looking for a classic favorite or something new to add to your holiday spread, you're sure to find something to tempt your taste buds. The cookies will be pre-wrapped in convenient packages of 1, 2, 3, or 4 dozen, making it easy to pick

up a sweet treat for yourself or to gift to someone special.

For those planning ahead, pre-orders are available to ensure you get the cookies you want before they sell out. To place an order, simply call 218-927-3348 or email ACHS@aitkincohs.org. Remember, pre-ordered cookies must be picked up by 11:00 a.m. on the day of the sale.

Proceeds from the Cookie Walk will go toward supporting the Aitkin County Historical Society, helping fund its mission to preserve and share the rich history of the Aitkin area.

For more information or to pre-order cookies, contact the Historical Society at 218-927-3348 or email ACHS@aitkincohs.org.

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