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COMMUNITY EVENTS

November
22nd - Northland Arboretum Holiday Market 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. with over 30 local vendors offering a wide variety of gifts, handmade goods, crafts, and seasonal products, you're sure to find something special for everyone on your list.
23rd - Riverwood Healthcare Center's Auxiliary 40th Annual Lights of Love ceremony at 1 p.m. in the Aitkin Clinic lobby. Community members are invited to purchase a light for the Christmas tree with a minimum donation of \$5 in honor or memory of someone special while supporting 0auxiliary fund-raising efforts. Donation forms are available online and at Riverwood's main lobby and cafeteria. A scroll of names will remain on display beside the decorated trees through the end of the year.
27th - Free Thanksgiving Community Meal, Staples, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., register www.eventbrite.com/e/1958025891149?aff=oddtcreator
28th - Nisswa City of Lights downtown Nisswa start at 12 p.m. Sip cider by the bonfire, savor sweet treats, hop on a cozy train ride, and share a magical moment with Santa himself. End the night with fireworks painting the winter sky — the perfect start to the season.
28th - World Famous Fish House Parade in Aitkin, 1 p.m., 5K Fun Run / Walk 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Fish House 5K Fun Run / Walk. Also 10 a.m.- 12 p.m. Meet & Greet with Santa Claus, 10 a.m.- 3 p.m. Craft & Bake Sale Market by Aitkin County Friends of the Arts both at Ripple Center 301 Minnesota Ave. N.
28th - Mille Lacs Trails & Aitkin Sno-Drifters Vintage Snowmobile Show, 10 a.m.- 3 p.m. on 3rd Street between Minnesota Ave. North and 1st Ave. NE
29th - Holiday Parade of Lights at 5:30 p.m. in Staples
December
2nd - Cuyuna Regional Medical Center Tree of Love Lighting at 3 p.m. in the hospital's main lobby.
4th - Holiday Gingerbread Houses, 5 p.m., in Staples
4th - Christmas Vendor Bingo at American Legion Post 86, Aitkin, 5 - 8 p.m., registration starts at 5 p.m.
4th & 5th - Annual MN Adult & Teen Challenge Christmas Concert 6 p.m. Heritage Church in Brainerd, Register <https://www.mntc.org/event/brainerd-christmas-concert-thursday/>
4th, 5th & 6th - Sensory Friendly Holiday Visit with Santa Claus at Northland Arboretum with adjust lighting, calming music, visual supports, adapted activities with a experienced trained Santa for neurodivergent children and their families. Register by Dec. 1 for your time slot a <https://sites.google.com/isd181.org/santa-at-the-arboretum/home?authuser=0> or contact 218-454-9264 or pbccsensofriendlyevents@gmail.com.
5th - Aitkin County Historical Society Cookie Walk at 20 Pacific Street SW in Aitkin starting at 9 a.m.
5th - Tree Lighting Ceremony at Mall Plaza in downtown Crosby. Hosted by the Cuyuna Lakes Chamber. Call 218-546-8131 for additional information.
5th - Free photos with Santa at Fleet Farm, 14114 Dellwood Dr. N., Baxter, 4 - 7 p.m.
5th - Whoville in Crosslake Town Square, 4:30-6:30 p.m. Free photoswith Santa & Mrs. Claus.
5th - Jack Klatt will perform at the Grassroots Concerts, 7 p.m. at the Journey Church, 5459 Lakers Lane (next to the school in Nisswa.) His unique sound defies genre with influences that pull from a wide range of American music, from rhythm and blues and early rock and roll, to country and folk music.
Send your community events information to hopper@crosbyironton.net or send us a message via www.NewsHopper.net/contact/



Thanksgiving Dinner Buffet

Thursday, November 27

11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
\$45 adults, \$17 kids (4-11),
3 & under Free

Call Now 218-678-4644 to reserve your spot!



Carving Station: Rosemary & Sage Broasted Turkey with Cranberry-Jalapeno Relish, Triple Smoked Dark Cherrywood Bone-in Ham, Slow Roasted Rosemary and Sea Salt Prime Rib with Au Jus & Creamy Horseradish

Chef's Salad Bar • Chef's Sides: Mascarpone Mashed Potatoes with Creamy Mushroom Gravy, Winter Squash Agrodolce, Sweet Potato Streusel Casserole with Crispy Coconut, Charred Brussel Sprouts with Bacon & Maple-bourbon Glaze, Spinach & Artichocke Dip with Tortilla Chips, Crusted Rosemary Scalloped Potatoes, Four Cheese Mac & Cheese, Gruyere & Fontina Cheese Corn Casserole, Fresh Baked Sweet Potato Rolls, Peel & Eat Shrimp with Cocktail Sauce, Smoked Salmon and Lake Trout by Northern Waters Smokehaus

Desserts: Apple Pumpkin Pecan Crisp with Vanilla Ice Cream, Vanilla Creme Brule, Flourless Chocolate Torte, Assortment of Fruit & Cream Pies

CHRISTKINDMRKT

Annual Christmas Market

Saturday, December 6 **10 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Craft Vendors 10 a.m.–3 p.m. (Ballroom Upper Level)
Visit Santa 11 a.m.–3 p.m. (The Garage)
Cookie Decorating 12–2 p.m. \$4 (The Garage)

Grab Lunch At Ruby's On The Lake
Spa Specials 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (Bay Lake Salon & Spa)
Christmas Shopping Fun 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (The Garage)

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Friday 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Saturday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
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READER RIBBETS

Need honest leadership on education

Governor Tim Walz’s recent remarks at a Texas conference—where he made several claims about Minnesota’s education system that intentionally do not align with reality—offer a glimpse into a broader pattern in his leadership. These comments were deliberate lies and they illustrate a consistent effort to present Minnesota’s challenges as though they are successes, relying on polished narratives rather than straightforward honesty. This pattern has defined much of his tenure and continues to frustrate families, educators, and communities who are grappling with the consequences of problems he so often minimizes.

A central shortcoming of Walz’s leadership has been his habit of promising comprehensive solutions while delivering programs that are partial or incomplete. His description of Minnesota as having “universal pre-K,” despite the state offering only a limited Voluntary Pre-K program that serves a relatively small share of children, is another deceptive tactic. His tendency to overstate progress creates confusion for families and undermines trust in the state’s ability to deliver on its commitments. Minnesotans deserve clarity, not the impression that longstanding goals have already been achieved when they have not.

This same choice to present lies as truth appeared in Walz’s comments about student achievement. Despite significant declines in reading, math, and science scores in recent years, he portrayed the state’s academic performance as improving. Families and educators, however, know that many students are struggling more than ever, and they face the consequences of these setbacks every day in classrooms across the state. When a governor glosses over such declines, it signals a leadership style that prefers optimistic, and deliberately inaccurate, messaging rather than honestly reporting difficulties and charting a path forward. That same unwillingness to face reality is how enormous fraud schemes—totaling more than a billion dollars in losses—were able to occur under his administration’s watch. When you ignore, or hide, the obvious, you invite disaster.

The Governor’s selective use of data similarly extends to issues such as absenteeism and graduation rates. While he highlighted a slight improvement in absenteeism and celebrated a record-high graduation rate, these claims lack the broader context needed to understand what is truly happening. Chronic absenteeism remains far worse than before the pandemic, and graduation numbers lose their meaning when so many students are not meeting grade-level expectations. Spiking the football on graduation rates while students leave high school unprepared for the real world is another example of what happens when leadership refuses to confront what is plainly in front of us. Presenting statistics without context distorts the picture and allows systemic issues to go unaddressed.

Taken together, these examples from the Texas conference reveal a larger shortcoming: Walz’s leadership defaults to purposeful and dishonest reporting in order to portray a much better image than the reality. Whether the issue is education, public safety, economic strain, or oversight failures that enabled large-scale fraud, Minnesotans frequently encounter a narrative from their governor that does not match their day-to-day reality. Painting a political picture that is not based on facts erodes confidence and makes it more difficult to rally public support for meaningful solutions.

Minnesota has long prided itself on strong schools and strong institutions, but rebuilding that strength requires leadership grounded in transparency and accountability. Minnesotans are not asking for perfect outcomes, only for honest assessments and a clear-eyed willingness to address problems head-on. If Governor Walz wants to lead the state forward effectively, he must begin by replacing reassuring rhetoric with candid acknowledgment of the reality of the situation and then work forward towards actual solutions.

Rep. Ron Kresha,
Co-Chair of the House Education Finance Committee

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Garrison area Toys for Tots aiming to bring joy to area families

The holiday spirit is already humming across the Mille Lacs region as the Garrison-area Toys for Tots Campaign kicks into high gear. Volunteers are busy sorting, stacking, and preparing to deliver joy to children and families who need it most this Christmas season.

The Marine Toys for Tots Program—fueled each year by generous community donations—has one simple but powerful mission: collect new, unwrapped toys and place them in the hands of less fortunate children at Christmas.

The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity established in 1991 at the request of the U.S. Marine Corps, is known for its remarkable efficiency—97% of every donation goes directly toward providing toys for children.

Locally, the Garrison-area campaign serves families throughout the southernmost part of Crow Wing County

and into Mille Lacs County around the Mille Lacs Lake area. Their reach also extends into nearby corners of Aitkin and Morrison counties. Communities served include Garrison, Malmo, Isle, Wahkon, Onamia, Deerwood, Crosby, Crosslake, and portions of southern Brainerd.

Families outside these areas can text 218-820-7359 for help finding their nearest Toys for Tots campaign.

The campaign will once again host a one-day, drive-up toy distribution, offering a simple and stress-free experience. No pre-registration is required; toys are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis on Saturday, Dec. 13 at the Onamia Vets Club located at 38692 US-169 from 1:00–3:00 p.m. (or while supplies last).

Stay in your vehicle and follow posted signs and traffic direction upon arrival. An order taker will come to your window to gather each child's age and gender.

Volunteers will carefully select toys, and a runner will deliver the bag right to your car.

Families with children who benefit from sensory-friendly toys are encouraged to mention it during the order process or text the campaign lead directly at 218-820-7359. Organizers will do their best to meet these requests as supplies allow.

Whether you're dropping

a toy into a collection box, making a monetary donation, or spreading the word, every act of kindness fuels the mission.

Toy drive at Menards

Menards home improvement store on 15236 Dellwood Dr. in Brainerd has launched its annual Toy Drive through December 15, inviting community members to help bring holiday joy to local children in need.

Shoppers visiting Menards will find a designated drop box near the exit door, ready to collect new, unwrapped toys. Store employees say the goal is simple: to ensure every child in the community wakes up to a bit of Christmas magic. They know that this time of year can be tough for some families and every gift helps brighten the holidays for kids in our area.

But the spirit of the season doesn't stop at the donation box. Just a few aisles away, families can discover one of the Midwest's most charming holiday traditions: the Enchanted Forest, a Menards hallmark for more than fifty years.

Stepping into the Enchanted Forest is like walking straight into a Christmas card. Children—and adults—are greeted with a wonderland of gleaming ornaments, glowing lights, whimsical displays, and beautifully decorated trees. It's become an annual ritual for many families, offering a picture-perfect backdrop for making holiday memories that brings out the kid in everyone.



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