

FAIRBANKS

Daily News-Miner

THE VOICE OF INTERIOR ALASKA SINCE 1903

Inside Today

Fairbanks 7-year-old injured in hit-and-run on Lathrop Street flown to Anchorage. » A5

GOOD MORNING



The weather.

The weather takes a turn today, getting colder with a chance of rain and snow.

High today40
Low tonight29

WEATHER » A11

Aurora forecast.

Auroral activity will be moderate. Weather permitting, moderate displays will be visible overhead from Barrow to Talkeetna.

This information is provided by aurora forecasters at the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more information about the aurora, visit <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast>

...



THE TASTE OF FALL

Butternut squash is on the menu.

FOOD
Page B5

...



SOLID SPIKERS

Monroe volleyball improves to 6-0 with four-set win over Hutchison.

SPORTS
Page B1

...

NO SALE

Auction of potato farm near Nenana yields no takers.

INTERIOR
Page A5

...

SOURDOUGH JACK:

"I prefer my squash in sport-form."



Mushers Hall to close for winter

Mushing club can't afford to keep it open

By Tim Mowry
TMOWRY@NEWSMINER.COM

The Mushers Hall on Farmers Loop won't be hosting any meetings, Christmas parties, wedding receptions or other functions this winter.

Facing a financial shortfall and an organizational upheaval, the Alaska Dog Musher's Association has decided to close the iconic log structure for the winter.

ADMA president Mike McCowan said the building has been operating at a loss for several years but that the club was able to compensate with proceeds from



The Alaska Dog Musher's Association Mushers Hall is seen Monday on Farmers Loop. SAM HARREL/NEWS-MINER

pull-tab gaming permits. However, the club's pull-tab revenues have plummeted, and it can no longer afford to heat the 2,600-square-foot building during the winter.

The ADMA board of directors voted last month to close the hall from Oct. 1 to March 1, McCowan said.

"That building has never really paid for itself for at least 25 years," McCowan

said. "As time went on, it became a bigger, more costly albatross."

The hall, which is located at 4 Mile Farmers Loop, is a popular spot for holding private events and public functions.

It was built in the late 1970s or early 1980s after the ADMA received a large chunk of money from the Alaska Legislature to construct it, McCowan said. Back then, when the oil and money were flowing, nobody ever thought about the costs associated with heating, maintaining and insuring the building, he said. The club spends \$13,000 to \$14,000 in insurance and property taxes annually, McCowan said.

"When you figure in the electric and heating costs, that goes up dramatically," he said.

HALL » A12



West Valley High School student counselor Willie Blackburn talks with students in a lunchtime discussion circle Tuesday during the 26th annual high school African-American Student Leadership Conference at the Pioneer Park Civic Center. PHOTOS BY ERIC ENGMAN/NEWS-MINER

Looking to the future

African-American Student Leadership Conference stresses the importance of education

By Weston Morrow
WMORROW@NEWSMINER.COM

A quarter century ago, Virgie King saw a problem in Fairbanks.

King was working as a teacher in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District at the time and noticed there were not nearly enough positive role models for black students.

There were, at the time, no black principals or administrators in the district office, King said. With only a few black teachers and no black principals to look up to, many black students in the district lacked strong role models.

"We needed role models,"

King said. "To do that, we had to bring someone from outside."

So King decided to bring role models into the district to meet and speak to students. In 1986, King started the first African-American Student Leadership Conference in Fairbanks.

The conference that first year took place only at Tanana Middle School, where King was teaching. After that first year, the conference was such a success at Tanana that they decided to expand it not only to all the other middle schools but also to the high schools.

CONFERENCE » A12



Students gather in lunchtime discussion circles during the conference.

Loaded railcars separate from train

Sam Friedman
SFRIEDMAN@NEWSMINER.COM

Nine loaded railcars separated from a train and hit a delivery trailer Monday night near Spenard Builders Supply on Phillips Field Road.

The incident involved six empty and nine loaded flatcars pulled by a locomotive on their way to Flowline to deliver pipe, according to a news release from the Alaska Railroad Corp. About 11:30 p.m. the cars separated in the middle of a track switching operation. The railcars did not derail but rolled into vehicles on a track within the Spenard yard.

"The loaded cars hit a small trailer loaded with Sheetrock, rolled over a stack of plywood, and shoved into two box delivery trucks," according to the news release.

The separation occurred at the intersection of the main line and a spur line, where the cars containing the pipe were being picked up, according to Alaska Railroad Corp. spokesman Tim Sullivan.

No one was hurt in the incident and the cars stopped short of the Spenard Builders Supply building. The cause of the separation of the railcars is under investigation. No damage estimate was available.

The Spenard Builders Supply store remains open for business, according to branch manager Richard Green. The railcars were removed Tuesday afternoon.

Contact staff writer Sam Friedman at 459-7545. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMcirme.

Gas utility hearings turn contentious on second day

Interior Gas Utility counsel grills Fairbanks Natural Gas on ownership, decision-making

By Matt Buxton
MBUXTON@NEWSMINER.COM

The investor who handles a majority share of Fairbanks Natural Gas' parent company told the Regulatory Commission of Alaska he'll commit to a six-year buildout of gas distribution as long as the state grants the company \$150 million in financing.

But whether the words of Hendrik

Vroege, a partner at the Minnesota-based EBF & Associates, L.P., will amount to anything is up to debate, at least in the eyes of the municipal Interior Gas Utility's counsel Robin Brena.

The revelation came at the end of the second day of a week-long hearing between the two utilities — FNG and IGU — as they compete for the RCA's approval to deliver natural gas to the medium-density areas of the Fairbanks

North Star Borough.

Brena spent much of Tuesday grilling Vroege in what ranged from heated exchanges to lengthy and seemingly tedious forays into technical explanations of ownership structures and investment financing.

At the heart of the day's questioning was the complicated ownership and decision-making authority above FNG that, at times, even Vroege had difficulty clarifying.

Fairbanks Natural Gas is owned by Pentax Alaska Natural Gas Co., which is 85 percent owned by Harrington Partners, which is managed by EBF, where

Vroege sits on a board of four.

Going above the Harrington Partners or EBF and who exactly calls the shots was less clear, and Brena spent nearly an hour working through a chart of which companies owned which and how they were affiliated.

The activity illustrated the skepticism that a number of IGU's backers have voiced about the ability of FNG, bound by its complicated ownership structure, to expand its service quickly to address the high energy prices and ongoing air pollution woes in the Interior.

GAS » A12

