

LITCHFIELD Independent Review

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RUNNING THE COURSE TO SUCCESS

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BOOTED FROM UNBEATEN RANKS

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CITY COUNCIL PLAYS BALL WITH OPTIMIST PARK UPGRADES

STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Optimist Park is in the midst of several upgrades meant to prepare the baseball complex for the Minnesota Baseball Association town ball state tournament in 2023. In addition to an expanded canopy to shelter seats behind home plate and an upgraded press box, the City Council last week approved a change to dugouts, improved sound system and extension of left field foul line fencing.

Baseball association receives OK for additional upgrades at park

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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The improvements keep coming for Optimist Park in Litchfield.

The baseball park, home to Litchfield teams from high school to town ball, will receive dugouts expansion, an extension of left field foul line fencing and improved sound system in the near future following Litchfield City Council approval of the upgrades.

The flurry of improvements are part of an effort to prepare Optimist Park for the state's annual amateur baseball showcase – the Minnesota Baseball Association

state tournament – which Litchfield will co-host with Dassel and Delano in 2023, the 100th anniversary of the tournament.

Prior to that, Litchfield will play host to the region tournament next summer.

While the City Council must approve changes at Optimist Park – the city owns the property – all of the most recent upgrades will be paid for by Litchfield Baseball Association.

“We’ve done a lot of projects over the years without running them by the council,” said Nick Ridgeway, a member of the baseball association’s board of directors. Given the city’s recent investments in Optimist Park, however, the association understood the importance of getting City Council approval for any projects, he said.

During an early September meeting, the council approved a bid for

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Jensen says GOP has an image problem

Minnesota’s medical ‘maverick’ weighs in on gubernatorial race

BY STEPHEN WIBLEMO
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When it comes to COVID-19, Dr. Scott Jensen says he’s the same skeptical physician he’s always been.

“I don’t care if you’ve got MD behind your name or whatever letters you have behind your name, people like to be reached out to and thought of as an expert, and I think we’re seeing some of that,” said Jensen, a Minnesota gubernatorial candidate who sat down with Leader reporters last week for an interview. He was in Hutchinson speaking at a rally opposing vaccine mandates.

Jensen’s criticism was aimed at people such as Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and chief medical advisor to the president of the United States. Jensen accused both men of basking in the national recognition they had received as the country was enveloped in the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We see those bureaucrats almost thrilled to the occasion of, ‘Gee, I’ve never been so important. I must really be something.’ People like that,” Jensen said.

But like Osterholm and Fauci, Jensen was a little-known figure

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STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN WIBLEMO

Dr. Scott Jensen spoke last week in Hutchinson’s Library Square during a rally to oppose vaccine mandates. Jensen is running for governor of Minnesota.

Graduating to a new life

Drug court puts participants on path to recovery, stability

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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Drug and alcohol use and related trouble led Ben Miller to spending much of his teen and adult years in the court system.

But in early September the 37-year-old Litchfield man moved to a life beyond the courtroom, as the 54th graduate of the Eighth Judicial District’s Treatment Court program, also known as “drug court.”

Miller, who had spent more than two years in the program, received a diploma and a hearty handshake from Judge Steven Wentzell following a drug court session held in Litchfield’s Central Park, a serene setting created by COVID-19 precautions.

“It means a lot to me,” Miller said as he held the framed diploma. “It means I achieved something I set out to do, that I was able to make it.”

Drug court is an 18- to 24-month program that seeks to help chemically dependent individuals who might be at higher risk of reoffending, through intensive supervision and oversight. The program includes phases that need to be followed by participants such as treatment, establishing in the community, job and housing stability, and ultimately living a lifestyle of recovery.

The Eighth Judicial District Treatment program is marking its seventh year of operation this year, a term in which participants and administrators agree has seen significant positive change. According to statistics provided by the court, of the 54 graduates of the program during the past seven years, 70 percent have not been charged with a new crime, and 63 percent have no known relapses.

In addition to the reduction in the cycle of criminal activity and chemical dependency, administrators say, the program has had other positive benefits for participants. Twenty-two graduates entered the program without a valid driver’s license, but 19 had earned a license by the time they graduated. Nine graduates earned a high school diploma or GED while participating in the program.

Thirty-three of the 54 graduates entered the program unemployed, but 29 of them were working at least part time when they graduated, while another took a part-time job shortly after graduation, according to Karon White, treatment court coordinator.

More than \$23,000 in fines, fees and restitution have been paid or worked off through community work service by participants. All participants also are required to complete a 50-hour volunteer project.

“Drug court is one of the most researched programs in the country to be proven to be effective, and evidence-based programs,” White said. “So we believe in that program, and we’re going to continue to

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