

# LITCHFIELD Independent Review

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020



STAFF PHOTOS BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Rather than charge a set price, Swan's Cafe asked for a free-will offering for the Thanksgiving meals it served. Owner Jeff Swanson said he hoped to break even, and that the meal was intended to show the restaurant's place in the community the past 25 years.

## Serving up 'thanks' to the community

Swan's Cafe prepares Thanksgiving dinners for free-will offering

BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
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It's been a difficult year for the restaurant and hospitality industry.

But as he contemplates the survival of his own business amid COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, Jeff Swanson knows there are plenty of others who are struggling.

So on Thanksgiving Day, the owner of Swan's Café in Litchfield threw out the traditional model for business success and served turkey dinners with all the fixings to anyone who asked, for a price customer determined on their own.

"With all this COVID (stuff), it's just giving back to the community, I guess," Swanson said Nov. 25, amid the planning for the next day's big dinner. "People seem to appreciate it."

With COVID-19 case rates rising throughout the state, Gov. Tim Walz in a televised address Nov. 18 announced an executive order that closed for a four-week "pause" all restaurants and bars, except for take-out and delivery, be-

ginning Nov. 21. The order also limited pick-up customers to no more than five at any one time.

Walz issued a similar — though more restrictive — executive order in March this year, then slowly loosened restrictions to allow customers to return to indoor dining and drinking in limited capacity. But as numbers spiked in early and mid-November, the decision was made to dial back again.

"This continues to be a devastating time for the hospitality industry that provides 1 in 10 jobs in Minnesota, but now sees half of its businesses facing permanent closure in the coming months," Hospitality Minnesota, a lodging, restaurant, resort and campground association, said statement following the executive order. "While we appreciate that the governor is not shutting down restaurants, bars and events as some other states are doing, we are concerned about the economic and jobs impact on these businesses."

The hospitality industry wasn't the only

**Thanksgiving to 2 >**



Jeff Swanson, owner of Swan's Cafe, pours gravy over the mashed potatoes in one of the hundreds of meals served for a free-will Thanksgiving dinner.

## ACGC moves to distance learning Some students will still attend class at school

BY AMY WILDE  
Special to the Independent Review

A sharp increase in the number of COVID-19 virus cases in the Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City area prompted the ACGC School District to move to a distance learning model for most of its students. Following three days' preparation, the district today started distance learning, in which most students will learn virtually four days a week at home, via Chromebook computers.

An exception to this will be some special education students, as well as children of Tier 1 "essential workers" who will be educated and cared for via special day care programs. Activities Director Marj Maurer told the ACGC School Board on Nov. 23 that, to date, 51 children had requested enrollment in the child care for essential workers. Maurer also noted

that student activities such as athletics are being "paused" to at least Dec. 15. This follows a modified fall sports season that saw average participation numbers, with the exception of high school football, where participation was down slightly.

At the Nov. 23 ACGC school board meeting, Principals Robin Wall, Kodi Goracke and Supt. Nels Onstad outlined changes slated to begin today. Students will be expected to check in to "virtual" live classes on their computers. Teachers will be available for private consultations and messaging early in the day and for about an hour after classes end at 3:15 p.m.

The program will not look exactly like "distance learning" did last spring.

"We had a number of students from last year who did not do well in distance learning or engaging with their teachers... some spe-

cial education and ESL (English as a Second Language) students will continue to be in the building part-time," Onstad told the board. "We may have to do some rebooting, monitoring and readjusting as time goes on."

Onstad acknowledged that "we anticipate issues the first few days or weeks."

Materials will be both "paper and pencil"-based and computer-based, depending on the skill level of the students.

The week before buildings closed to in-person classes, teachers spent time familiarizing their students with the technology. Onstad added that the district has acquired 100 "hot spots" to lend to families who lack adequate broadband at their homes.

Most teachers will lead their classes from the school facilities, but there are some individuals

**ACGC to 2 >**

## County will restrict facility access due to COVID-19 surge

Meeker County government facilities will have controlled entrances beginning this week. Rising COVID-19 cases prompted county leaders on Nov. 24 to adopt a policy of locking doors at the courthouse, Family Services Center and transportation facility — similar to restrictions the county enacted in March when the pandemic first hit Minnesota.

"Our focus continues to be keeping both the public and county staff safe from being exposed to, or contracting, COVID-19 at one of our facilities," Administrator Paul Virnig said in a news release. "While we continue to serve Meeker County, changing how we deliver services to the public will help us accomplish this goal. We are doing our part to help alleviate the stress the current surge in COVID cases has placed on our health care, nursing and school facilities and staff."

Those who need to do business with the county can still do so by telephone, email, through the county website, or by scheduling an in-person appointment when necessary.

County staff contact information is available on the website at [www.co.meeker.us](http://www.co.meeker.us). Additionally, drop boxes are located near the courthouse parking lot entrance and near the main entrance to the Family Services Center for delivery of documents. When using drop boxes, people should clearly mark to which department the documents are to be delivered.

Notes posted at the entry to county facilities

**Facilities to 2 >**

## Audit shows district's finances sound

Assets up due to construction bonding

BY BRENT SCHACHERER  
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Litchfield Public Schools' finances look solid, according to an audit discussed during the school board meeting Nov. 23.

The audit, which encompasses the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, shows the school district with total assets of about \$63 million. That's up about \$34 million from 2019, almost entirely because of the influx of revenue that resulted from the issuance of capital bonds, according to Justin McGraw of Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, who presented the audit report. Those assets will be spent down as construction at district buildings is completed.

The district's average daily membership, or enrollment, was 1,562 for fiscal year 2020, but the district has projected a 2.5 percent to 3 percent decline in 2021, which will affect its revenue.

The district's projected revenue for 2021 is \$19,206,724 with projected expenditures of \$18,729,058.

The majority of the district's revenue comes from the state, which provided 84.26 percent of its revenue in 2020, with local property taxes providing 9.09 percent.

School food service is projected to have a fund balance of \$192,043 in 2021, up about \$14,000 from the current fiscal year. The Community Service, or Community Education, fund balance is projected to drop by nearly \$20,000, to \$107,852 in fiscal year 2021.

**Audit to 2 >**

