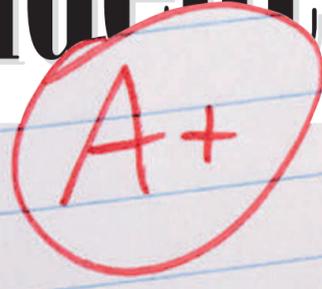


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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020



Santa Claus received a Litchfield Fire Department escort during a procession that wove through the south part of town Saturday afternoon.

STAFF PHOTOS BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Santa Claus comes to town

Santa Claus traditionally visits Litchfield for a few weekends every December, setting up shop in the “Santa house” in the southwest corner of Central Park.

But the coronavirus pandemic changed things this week. With worries about close contact between Santa and young children and the chance of spreading COVID-19, the decision was made not to put the Santa house out this year.

That did not stop Santa Claus or his helpers — also known as the Litchfield Fire Department.

Rather than risk a Santa-less Christmas because children could not go to see the jolly old elf, fire department members decided to bring Santa to the children on two Saturdays this year.

Santa’s first visit was this past Saturday, as he rode on a trailer pulled by a fire department rig and escorted by several helpers — fire department members and their families. The Christmas convoy started at the fire hall, then wound its way through the south part of town.

Santa waved and asked children along the route for their Christmas wishes — all at a safe social distance — while firefighters and their families handed out candy canes.

Don’t worry if you missed this past week-



Santa Claus waves to children along as his caravan rolls along Butler Street near Prairie Park.

end’s visit. Santa and his helpers make a return visit this coming Saturday, this time looping

through the north part of the city.

— Brent Schacherer

High school sports ready to go when Gov. Walz gives ‘green light’

Minnesota State High School League approved three models for returning to play

BY ERIC KRAUSHAR
For the Leader

If Gov. Tim Walz gives the go-ahead to relieve Executive Order 20-99, the Minnesota State High School League is ready to un-pause sports Dec. 21 with contests beginning in early January.

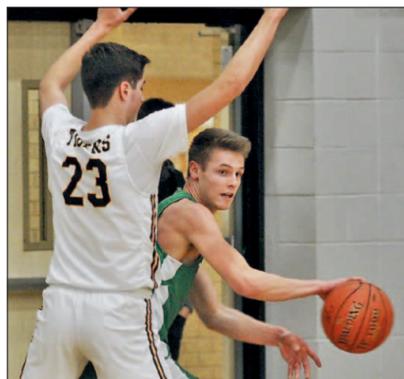
At the Dec. 3 Board of Directors Meeting,

Jill Johnson, athletic director at Waconia High School, chairwoman of the Return to Participation Task Force, set out three proposed timelines for winter and spring sports.

Winter seasons would conclude during the week of March 29, with spring seasons wrapping up the week of June 14.

Johnson said the task force focused on the number of contests as being primary, the length of the season being secondary. Section tournament length may be shrunk into a week or week-and-a-half. Postseason options for individuals and teams will continue to be evaluated.

The MSHSL acknowledged a need to maintain a near-normal spring sports season after



FILE PHOTO

Avery Liestman, playing in a game last winter, and other Litchfield High School athletes and coaches, have some idea of when their seasons might begin after action by the high school league last week.

MSHL to 2 >



FILE PHOTO

Solar arrays billed as “solar gardens,” have begun to pop up in Meeker County, with the first receiving County Board approval in 2017.

Solar garden plots receive county approval

Some commissioners worry about long-term effect

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
schacherer@hutchinsonleader.com

Meeker County commissioners on Dec. 1 cleared the way for two new solar energy gardens.

The County Board approved a pair of conditional use permits, both for properties in Swede Grove Township north of Grove City, that will allow construction of the solar energy operations.

Michael and Christine Buer of rural Grove City, and Brian DeGroot of Prinsburg own the two pieces of property, which are located in close proximity to each other on County State Aid Highway 25.

Though both conditional use permits received unanimous approval, Commissioner Mike Housman expressed concern about the long-term implications of the solar gardens. In particular, Housman said, the \$30,000 bond required by the county for decommissioning a solar garden probably is not enough.

“(The bond) is a paltry amount of money to cover future decommission,” Housman said. “That’s \$7.50 per panel. You can’t recycle a refrigerator for that.”

Each of the farms is to include approximately 4,000 solar panels and generate a maximum of 1 megawatt of power. They are contracted to provide electricity to the Xcel Energy power grid.

Housman said his concern was not directed at the specific applications discussed Tuesday, but more about the solar energy gardens — and the potential for enormous cost to remove them at some point in the future.

“We’re going to be paying the piper,” Housman said.

Commissioner Beth Oberg said she had similar concerns, adding that “we’re not the only ones starting to worry about it. It’s a nationwide issue.”

While the Buers were pursuing the solar garden “with the best of intentions, it’s a more systemic issue I’m worried about,” Oberg added.

County Board Chairman Bryan Larson was less concerned, especially he said, with the Buers, who he said are a third-generation farm family. The investment in the solar garden is “just a drop in the bucket” when compared to their traditional agricultural business. “I’m not worried about that one at all,” he said.

Larson also said that wiring for the solar field is buried 3 feet underground, ensuring that it would not be an issue in the future.

Commissioner Steve Schmidt also said that, in addition to the bond, the contract includes



Mike Housman



Bryan Larson

Solar to 2 >

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