

LITCHFIELD Independent Review

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A CROW RIVER MEDIA
NEWSPAPER
SINCE 1876

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Dragons earn last-second
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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021



A parting gift

Emmaus Gift Shop fell victim to pandemic,
changing times but closed with gift to the community

STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Former Augustana Auxiliary president Judy Hulterstrum, and current co-presidents Ruth Massingham and Connie Meyer recently talked about the history of Augustana Auxiliary and Emmaus Gift Shop while looking through mementos of the organization. Emmaus Gift Shop officially closed at the end of last year, but \$18,000 in proceeds from its final sales were donated to area nonprofit organizations last month.

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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After nearly 70 years of giving, it was no surprise that the final official acts of the Augustana Homes Auxiliary were to donate more than \$18,000 to more than 30 nonprofit organizations throughout the area.

The mid-February gesture came during a bittersweet period for the volunteer organization, which for decades had run the Emmaus Place Gift Shop in the Ecumen senior housing complex.

The auxiliary's membership had decided in November that the gift shop, which was founded in 1953, would not reopen, and their

mission of supporting residents of the home through gift shop proceeds had come to an end, as well.

"I think we would be remiss if we didn't thank, you know, the community for their support over the 67 years," auxiliary co-president Connie Meyer said. "We're donating over \$18,000 back to the community, and I think that's special."

"We want to spread it around the community," Meyer continued. "We feel with COVID, there were so many organizations that were not able to do any fundraising. They need some help. We wanted to give back to them so they could still prosper."

The coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions were what forced the auxiliary's deci-

sion to close the gift shop, Meyer said, though changing trends in shopping and gift giving also played a role in the shop's demise.

The gift shop closed a year ago this week, March 12, 2020, as the state went into lockdown in response to the first reported cases of COVID-19 in Minnesota arriving about a week before.

As a senior facility with its residents among the most-vulnerable population, Ecumen closed to outsiders. That included auxiliary members who normally would have run the gift shop. Of course, even if the volunteers would have been permitted inside to run the gift shop, their clientele would have been extremely limited,

Emmaus to 2 >

County vaccination rate 'on par' with others

18.8% of county has
received at least one dose
of vaccine

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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Nearly 18 percent of Meeker County residents had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination as of Monday morning.

It's a good start, according to Meeker County Public Health Director Diane Winter, but there's still plenty of work to be done.

Among the best strategies for those still awaiting a vaccination are patience and vigilance.

"I guess what I look at is what is happening around the state," Winter said in regard to the pace of vaccinations in Meeker County. "Are we in line with what other counties are doing? And looking at other counties around us, it appears we are on par."

When it comes to giving vaccinations, the county public health department as well as medical facilities such as Meeker Memorial Hospital and Clinics, are at the mercy of the vaccine supply chain.

"It is really out of our hands," Winter explained. "We give the vaccine when we get it."

As of Monday morning, Minnesota Department of Health reported that 1.046 million people statewide — 18.8% — had received at least one vaccine dose, with about 570,000 having received two doses. In Meeker County, 4,116 people, or 17.8%, had received at least one dose of the vaccine.

The majority of the people statewide who have received at least one dose — 548,380 people — are in the 65-plus age group. In Meeker County 58.8 percent of residents 65-plus had received at least one dose.

Meeker County Public Health followed the state plan and concentrated its vaccination clinics on the "1A" group, which included se-

Vaccination to 2 >



PHOTO COURTESY MEEKER MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Dr. Deb Peterson, chief medical officer at Meeker Memorial Hospital, was among the staff who received a vaccination in late December from the hospital's first shipment of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

Playground to 2 >



ILLUSTRATION BY FLAGSHIP RECREATION

This concept drawing shows a play feature in the shape of a milk truck that could be part of the playground planned by First District Association.

City Council OKs playground plans

First District proposal
will be part of its
centennial celebration

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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First District Association will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding later this year, and it's making plans for some public ways to celebrate.

Two of those ideas received support from Litchfield City Council last week.

The bigger of the plans is creation of a dairy-themed playground in South Park, located just across West Ripley Street to the south of First District's campus.

Troy Gassman, engineering project manager at First District, explained the idea for the playground at last week's City Council meeting, saying that the cooperative wanted to make an initial contact with the City Council before moving ahead.

Initial plans call for the playground to be constructed in the southeast corner of South Park.

Parts and construction would cost \$115,714.84, according to an estimate from Flagship Recreation of Lake Elmo, which was included in the council's agenda packet

Playground structures would include one that resembles a milk truck and another that resembles a barn. Other play items would be swings, and seesaws and rocking features shaped like farm implements and cattle.

"I'm impressed with it," Council member Betty Allen said after seeing drawings of the features and playground location.

Gassman said that First District planned to finance construction, but welcomed input from the city. He also indicated an interest in a kind of "community build," similar to other playground construction in the city.

In the case of the South Park playground, Gassman said, the playground equipment company would come in and put up the main support posts, and First District employees would then walk over and work on the construction.

Depending on how quickly planning moves forward, Gassman said, the playground could be completed by September.

City Administrator Dave Cziok told the City Council that city staff saw no conflict with the playground construction at South Park.

The playground would be the latest upgrade at the park, which saw construction of a pickleball complex last summer. First District Association was one of several businesses that contributed to that project, as well.

UNTIL THE COWS COME HOME

Gassman and Council members Darlene Kotelnicki and Allen — who represented the Litchfield Downtown Council — also received approval from the City Council for a project aimed at promoting First District, as well as raising funds for nonprofit organizations in the area.

First District will purchase 17 fiberglass cows — eight adults and nine calves — which will be given to nonprofit organizations, who will decorate them. The cows then will be positioned throughout downtown and other areas and

