

New owners
Martin family takes over Hilltop Motel

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Taking the stage
Local woman directs play

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STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

Chris Beyer shows members of the KDA Board the discs used in disc golf. The board Tuesday agreed to fund \$2,200 toward creation of a course at RRCC.

Disc golf course gets KDA funding

Course expected to be ready for use when students move into RRCC dorm

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Koochiching County is likely to have another attraction that offers exercise and outside experiences by the time Rainy River Community College's dorm opens Aug. 24.

The Koochiching Development Authority Board Tuesday on a 4-1 vote agreed to fund \$2,200 toward a proposal to create on the RRCC campus a disc golf course.

The proposal was brought to the board by Brad Krasaway, RRCC student life director, and area resident Chris Beyer. The estimated total cost of \$6,628 would be split among the KDA, city of International Falls, and the RRCC Student Life Fund.

Krasaway and Beyer met last week with the International Falls Finance Committee,

which indicated it will recommend to the Falls City Council that it provide \$2,200 toward the effort.

Krasaway said disc golf is becoming more popular and he's heard from students that they would like more on-campus activities to do in their free time.

Beyer, who prepared a six-page proposal, said he's heard from friends, students and community members that are interested in disc golf, which he explained is played just like golf — with the goal of completing the course and the holes, or this case caged targets, in a minimum number of throws with flying discs.

He said players can start playing with a single disc costing less than \$10. A local retailer, he said, has agreed to stock the discs, which are created for different uses in the game, just

like golf clubs. The course could be completed in 60-90 minutes and could potentially be built around the campus.

"Having a disc golf course at Rainy River Community College will be a major benefit to the students, as well as the community of International Falls," wrote Beyer. "The sport provides an inexpensive option for outdoor physical activity, enabling a greater number of people to visit and enjoy the campus."

KDA Board members supported the idea, but Wayne Skoe, a member of the Koochiching Community Development Association, voted against the motion. While Skoe said he believed the proposal to be a good project, he opposed taking the request directly to the

Disc golf to A7 ►

Officials hold off on 'wheelage tax'

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Discussions by the Koochiching County Board Tuesday indicated commissioners will not seek to impose a new tax on the county's 13,000 registered vehicles in 2014.

County Engineer Joe Sutherland explained a "wheelage tax," which was originally passed by the legislature in 1972 for counties in the Twin Cities area, expanded to the rest of the state this year. The tax is a \$10 fee paid when drivers annually register their vehicles with the state. While there are exclusions to the tax, estimates are the new tax would generate more than \$130,000 each year for county road improvements and repairs.

"Today was just intended to give you an overview of (the tax)," Sutherland told the board Tuesday. "Money (from the fee) would be earmarked for road and bridge construction projects."

Until this year, only Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott and Washington counties have charged drivers a \$5 wheelage tax. County commissioners across the state are now considering the idea after the 2013 Minnesota Legislature expanded the option to all 87 counties, up to \$10 per car or truck. Motorcycles, mopeds, trailers, boat trailers, collector cars and ATVs are excluded from the tax.

Sutherland noted that if commissioners want to implement the fee, they must pass a resolution to adopt the tax by Aug. 1 in order for it to take effect in 2014.

"This is an opportunity the county can look at on a yearly basis," Sutherland said, noting that



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

From the left, Ross and Brent Benike accept the 2013 Koochiching County Family Farm Award from Stacy Hall, Koochiching County 4-H Program Coordinator, University of Minnesota Extension.

in 2018, the fee will bump up to \$20 per vehicle.

"My concern with something like this is that down the road, the state would want to start assessing fees to counties," said board Chairman Kevin Adee.

Sutherland said the state does, in fact, require a "small handling fee."

Commissioner Wayne Skoe also had concerns, including the families who own multiple vehicles.

"There are some people who don't have only two cars per family...they have six or seven vehicles," he said. "It might not sound like much...but it adds up."

Skoe said he was also worried that legislators would withhold highway funding to counties that apply the wheelage tax.

"Seventy-five percent of my calls are on highway (comments or concerns)," he said. "It is an issue, but I just can't see (a need for) the tax raise."

Commissioners said while an additional \$130,000 in Koochiching's highway fund is tempting, it "won't make or break the county."

Commissioner Wade Pavleck said with more money coming out of taxpayers' pockets, he felt the wheelage tax would only add to that load.

"I don't think this is the right time," he said. "Having said that...some day we might have to look at this."

In other business Tuesday, commissioners amended a June 4 motion to comply with an agreement of which they were previously unaware.

During its June 4 meeting, the board appointed Paul Nevanen to fill a vacated at-large position on the local airport commission on an interim basis while the commission's bylaws are reviewed before making a permanent appointment. Commissioners said Nevanen will serve in the position through the remainder of the year.

The commission governs operations of the Falls International Airport, which is jointly owned by International Falls and Koochiching County. Falls Mayor

Tax to A7 ►

Audit: City's 2012 general fund balance healthy

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

International Falls' 2012 general fund balance was healthy, according to its audit report.

Don Zierke, Miller McDonald Inc., presented the report Monday to the council, which approved the report.

While Zierke said the city's finances in 2012 were in good shape, he noted a few deficit funds that need attention to be cleared.

In addition, he suggested the airport finances be pulled from the city, similar to how the International Falls Recreation Commission finances were handled, with the local airport commission conducting an audit on airport finances. The city has handled the airport accounting and provided up-front cash flow, which is reimbursed when grants are received. Highlights of the report include:

■ The assets of the city exceeded liabilities at Dec. 31, 2012, by \$46.6 million.

■ Net position increased by 1.87 percent from prior year.

■ At Dec. 31, 2012, the unassigned fund balance for the general fund was \$3.37 million, or 67 percent of total general fund expenditures of \$5 million.

■ The water and sewer fund of the city earned \$506,559 from operations. Net position increased by only \$58,291, primarily because of net transfers out of \$521,570.

The 79-page audit report is available at the Falls Municipal Building.

In other business, the council agreed to seek an estimate of acres that are wetlands and highlands

within the 125-acre Donahue property west of the city.

The action came at Mayor Bob Anderson's suggestion. The information, he said, may be helpful to area residents and officials who will meet July 31 for the first step in the process to invite public input into creating a plan for development of the property which was donated to the city by the Donahue Family Trust. The city pays an annual \$15,000 brokerage fee at no interest over six years to Matt Donahue's company.

The board agreed to ask Dave Serrano of Arro of the North to provide the information to the council next week.

Councilor Pete Kalar told the council that he would at the next meeting recommend the city discontinue funding the Arrowhead Transit Bus transportation from the city to City Beach.

He said the bus is not seeing much ridership to the beach and continued funding is not justified.

In May, the council agreed to fund the bus, estimated at a cost of about \$1,000 per month, from June 15 to July 15. At that time, councilors said they would review participation in the free bus ride program at the end of a month to consider whether to provide further funding.

Councilor Cynthia Jaksa reported that last week's Pulling for Peace: International Tug of War activities came in about \$2,000 under budget as a result of donations.

She said the tug is a "civic event that's evolving" and plans are underway to expand activities

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