

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

# Time to get informed

Construction of the Great Northern Transmission Line is scheduled for 2017 — a few years and hurdles from now.

But we're pleased to hear from area residents that Minnesota Power officials have been listening to concerns as they tour communities along proposed alternative routes for the power line. Several people at Wednesday's open house in Littlefork said modifications to the Littlefork area route alternative have been made after people have delivered information about the locations of residences, wetland banks and air strips.

Any change in how we use our land can cause controversy. As one man said at Wednesday's open house, everyone wants electricity, but no one wants a transmission line in their backyard.

Locally, we've heard very few comments about the proposal and just a handful of questions. One very legitimate question raised publicly a couple weeks ago involved whether there are financial benefits of a transmission line traversing private property and a county. Minnesota Power staff at Wednesday's open house said there are benefits: The company pays market value to property owners for easements on the 200-foot right-of-way needed for the line's towers and property

taxes are paid to the county for the line.

And while Minnesota Power has held three rounds of public meetings in the last year about the proposal, there's still time and opportunities to find out more about the plan and to make your thoughts about it known.

This proposal faces a number challenges as it moves toward state and federal permitting processes. Those processes involve public comment periods and hearings, during which people may give input.

Should state and federal permits be granted, the project would then move toward the local level of approval. And should the alternative route near Littlefork be selected, a conditional use permit would be requested, which would require a public hearing be held by the Koochiching County Planning Commission. Even if the Planning Commission recommended approval of a CUP, the county board would have the ultimate say on whether to grant the permit.

With a few years before the planned construction, we urge area residents to find out now what they need to know about the proposed transmission line now so they make make informed comments should the Littlefork alternative route be selected to move forward.

**FIRST AMENDMENT** "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."



GUEST COLUMN

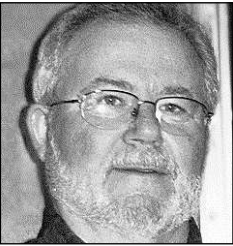
# Backus changes with season

As summer begins easing into fall I reflect back on the past three months and look forward to a busy season of concerts, plays, programs and special events at Backus.

In years past we could catch our breath a bit during the summer months but that's no longer true. The summer of 2013 was busier than ever with hundreds of children participating in the free Summer Food Service Program Monday through Friday each week. This summer Backus served 7,560 meals to children and parents in need. The Community Café continued on Tuesday and Thursday evenings with attendance averaging 65 per evening. Over 3,500 meals have been served since the program began last December. Summer meals are supported by the Minnesota Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in addition to funds from the Otto Bremer Foundation. Both food programs are supported by Backus and the Falls Hunger Coalition with additional funds from the Northland Foundation and the Knudson Fund.

The Summer Arts week drew 65 plus kids and included new classes in music and radio in addition to an art show and production of "Peter Pan." Open gyms engaged as many as 70 plus Kids on a daily basis and a kids' garden was planted, grew and is being harvested on the east side of the building. For three months kids filled the building and the school vibrated with their presence.

It's been much quieter since Labor Day. Our attention is focused on several new efforts aimed at enriching the community and citizens of all ages.



Ward MERRILL  
GUEST COMMENTARY

For the first time Backus Community Center will offer its own concert series and a season ticket. Thanks in large part to funding from the state's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Backus will present four concerts and one play on stage during the 2013-2014 season. Purchase of a \$45 season ticket will provide admission to a variety of great entertainment including: Chris Koza & Rogue Valley on Sept. 28; The Rose Ensemble on Oct. 14; Hard Travelin' with Woody on Nov. 7; "The Mill" on Feb. 28/March 1; and The Galactic Cowboy Orchestra on March 22. Hard Travelin' is sponsored with funding from the Marshall N. Knudson Family Community Fund with the Minnesota State Arts Board providing funds for the other four programs. Grant funding through the arts board is highly competitive with Backus competing against groups such as the Guthrie Theater, private colleges, state universities, the Ordway Theater in addition to professional dance and theater companies. Backus was one of 34 out of 90 applicants to receive funding for this season.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of these programs is the outreach that many of these artists will provide for

Koochiching County students during the school year. Although The Rose Ensemble and "The Mill" will only connect with students in International Falls, the other three groups will perform/provide outreach at Indus, Littlefork and Northome in addition to the Falls. Most groups will also provide a free school-age program at Backus for St. Thomas students and home-school students prior to their on-stage performances.

While Backus is still viewed by most as a center for arts and culture, many of our programs reach far beyond the walls of the historic building. Since adding our modern and fully-licensed kitchen in 2010, Backus has served over 25,700 meals to those in need. Musicians have visited and interacted with hundreds of area students. A Community Market has grown and flourished over the past seven seasons. Community events such as a triathlon and Riverfest concert have begun to take shape.

The center provides two full-time jobs and part-time employment to over a dozen workers. Over \$1.6 million in capital improvements have been made providing work for area contractors. If every dollar turns over seven times in a community – that represents over \$11 million to the local economy.

All this is not insignificant when you consider that less than a dozen years ago both historic buildings could have become rubble in a landfill. And not insignificant when you consider the humble beginnings of Citizens for Backus with dollars collected in a hat and a little girl donating \$11 from a lemonade stand to help save the buildings.

## How to contact your lawmakers

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## Share your point of view

Make a difference by writing a letter to the editor or contributing to our online discussions. The Journal's Opinion page is where meaningful community discussions take place.

## The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifalls-journal.com.

# Support United Way In Koochiching County

## Friends Against Abuse depends on United Way

Education is the precursor to change.

At Friends Against Abuse, we know how powerful education can be in bringing about long-lasting, community-based change. We see it every day with our six educational groups: Court ordered non-violent education for men or women, support group for female victims, Life Skills group for teen boys and one for teen girls and a group for victims of childhood sexual assault. International Falls is a healthier community based on the learning and growing that takes place because of these groups. These groups change lives and change our community in a positive way.

Without funding from the United Way, the groups we provide would cease to exist. It is through this annual funding support that we are able to continue to provide this vital education to the members of our community, creating safe havens, support systems and preventative measures to curb and end violence in our own backyard.

In this day and age, people are being asked to donate funds to



LeeAnn MEER  
GUEST COMMENTARY

support many causes. In my mind, giving to the United Way is the best way to help your community. The money that you give stays local, very little administrative costs are incurred and you can even select which agency you want to support. Knowing that your donation stays in your community and helps your friends, family, neighbors and community is an excellent incentive and an easy way to help your own town. If everyone donated a few dollars a paycheck – we would have the resources necessary to continue the needed educational programming we currently have in place.

Donations to United Way of Northeastern Minnesota in Koochiching County are down, while the needs are going up. Today, we have more agencies/causes asking for financial



## United Way of Northeastern MN

assistance and fewer dollars to access. When things get difficult and tough, it is even more important for us as community members to do what we can to help. With the news of the layoffs at Boise, we expect the need for our services to increase, and yet the donations from our community have decreased. We desperately need your help as citizens of this great community to help close this gap. Payroll deductions are the easiest way to do this. Even if you can only give a few dollars – they add up when everyone is doing what they can. Please support your community by giving to United Way of Northeastern Minnesota. Contact me at leeann@friendsagainstabuse.com.

Please consider contributing through United Way to help our community. If you would like to send in a gift, please mail your contribution to UWNEMN, c/o Julie Ehrman, 1303 16th Street, International Falls, MN 56649.