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Jensen recognized as officer of the year

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Few people can look back on their more than 30-year career and say there wasn't a single day they didn't want to go to work.

International Falls Fire and Ambulance Chief Jerry Jensen counts himself lucky to be one of them.

Jensen's self-admitted passion for his job and the safety of his community was recognized last week when he was named Fire Officer of the Year for cities with population less than 10,000 by the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association. The award was presented Oct. 18 in Rochester at the annual association banquet. It brings with it \$1,000 to be used for training. Award recipients are nominated by their peers.

A highlight of the presentation was a surprise visit by grown sons Thomas, who lives in Alabama, and Michael, who lives in Texas.

"You know I get a little emotional anyways, but I couldn't even talk," he said.

Jensen's family, and his city family, are a big part of his life and have played a crucial role in his career. Discussing the



Jensen to A7 ➤

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Meeting reveals common sentiment

Many seem angry Donahue benefited from 'gift'

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

The final session to gather input on the future of the Donahue property revealed what seems to be a common sentiment.

Near the end of the meeting Wednesday, International Falls Attorney Steve Shermoen said comments made at the four meetings appear to reveal many people are angry the city is paying \$90,000 in brokerage fees to Matt Donahue, a member of the Donahue family, based on a \$1.8 million appraisal.

He said the anger does not seem to involve so much the city's ownership of the land, however he said many have said it is the wrong time to put money into the property.

The Donahue family in 2009 provided the city 122 acres of land west of International Falls known as the Donahue property. A 15-point agreement calls for a walking trail and monument recognizing the family.

Several relatives of Matt Donahue attended Wednesday's meeting and at one point held up small signs saying "Matt take it back — give \$ back," referring to an offer Donahue made earlier to take the

property back and skip the final two \$15,000 installments of the brokerage fees.

But Shermoen said the city cannot simply give the property back and if it sells, must go through a public bidding process. Donahue could sue the city if it violates the contract it has with him, he said.

Several people have questioned the accuracy of the appraisal and Edie Sandstrom read a letter she received from Frank Bigelow, Bigelow Appraisals, Hibbing, which said he may have appraised the property differently with additional documents.

Worst case scenario, said Shermoen, is the city gained property assessed by Koochiching County at \$376,000 for \$94,000 in brokerage fees and title fees.

Gail Rognerud, International Falls city councilor and president of the city's Economic Development Commission, said she agreed with comments made asking the city not to spend money on the property.

She said there are greater spending needs in the city now, and the property, once the monument and trail are completed, should be kept for future generations to decide its use.

Several people echoed her idea, including Shawn Mason, EDA director, who agreed the city has

Donahue to A7 ➤



RRCC students carrying signs make their way down Fourth Street.

Spreading a message

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The Walk a Mile in Her Shoes — The International Men's March to Stop Rape, Gender Violence and Sexual Assault event — literally takes participants on a one-mile walk to reflect on and raise awareness of domestic violence.

When Friends Against Abuse, the local crisis preven-

tion center that hosts the event, was considering where to hold the walk in the event of rain, organizers were reminded: victims of domestic violence don't get a rain day.

"So even though it is raining and snowing, we will walk anyway," said LeeAnn Meer, executive director of Friends Against Abuse, to a crowd of about 90 people Wednesday.

This year marked the third time the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event made its way to

International Falls. Meer had nothing but positive things to say of Wednesday's event.

"Despite the weather, I'm really pleased with the turnout," she said.

People of all ages bundled up to participate in the walk and Meer said several Rainy River Community College students and athletes came to show their support as well as slip on a pair of red high heels for the walk.

"We had a couple young men walk in those high heels," she



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

Rainy River Community College students Ben Churilla, left, and Sean Deviney, slipped on a pair of red high heels for Wednesday's Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event. The one-mile walk event aims to raise awareness of domestic violence.

said. "We would never expect them to do that, but they did it."

Meer said it is when the younger generation steps up to make a difference, is when domestic violence and abuse will stop.

"I always tell young people, 'We need you guys and we need you now,'" Meer said. "When the younger people step up, it is my greatest hope that change will happen. Involvement is going to end (violence)."