

EXPOSURE

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Nature’s art or to use her offerings to create star trails or paint with light.

“It was so cool when we did some night photography at the cabin and everybody was gathered around the field and the only way people knew where they were was you’d see a little camera flash,” Deb Larson said.

Other members at the December meeting describe how odd it must look to travelers on Rainy Lake’s ice road or snowmobile trails as the group huddles against the cold, moves tripods one direction and then another direction, shouting settings for one another to try, until they are in the right position to capture the light of the stars presented against the dark sky.

The club was created in 2011 for a no-stress membership: If a member can’t come one month, it’s OK. Leaders are those who take the responsibility and show up.

“When we started, we didn’t want our meetings to be very structured,”

said Lori Dobbs, an active member and leader of the group. “We actually voted on it. We want it to be very laid back: We don’t pay dues — we just have fun.”

And the more members the better, they said. There are no competitions among members. Instead, they share their knowledge, skills and ideas with one another in an effort to improve all of their photography.

The women of the club joke they have not yet scared their one male member away. “We don’t want to lose him,” one member said, with another adding more men are welcome.

Meetings are held every third Wednesday in the basement room at the Falls Public Library, the site of the inception of the club following a photography workshop there.

“Someone said ‘We should form a photography club,’ and so we took the bull by the horns and did it right then and there,” Shuff said.

Each meeting opens with new business. That’s when the next month’s author is selected for the club’s blog, which can be found at www.northwoodsshutterbugs.blogspot.com.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Members of the Northwoods Shutterbugs in a photograph taken during a nighttime outing.

There, members take turns writing about their interest in photography and sharing their photos.

Meetings also include selection of the photo challenge for the next month, which for this month is winter sunset or sunrise.

Club members contribute a couple of their photos taken to meet the monthly challenge, which are shared in a slideshow at the following meeting. As the dozen or so members watched the slideshow in December, they offered compliments, encouragement, and techniques for

improvement.

Members are of different skill levels and have varying kinds of cameras and equipment, which is part of the fun, several members said.

Their common interest in photography has created camaraderie and friendship among many members, Shuff said. The bonding that takes place at meetings, photo-shoot adventures, and photography workshops is cherished, they said.

A photography workshop weekend in Grand Marais two years ago was fodder for several stories about

fun and photography. At this workshop, participants took photos of the same naturescapes, but realized how each — sometimes simply by nature of their height — brought a different perspective or angle to the photo.

The group is considering the location for a spring outing that may take them out of Borderland and their photography comfort zone.

Local adventures are a regular feature of the club, and they sometimes are scheduled by Mother Nature and require the use of headlamps for set up. One member suggested passersby who see them must wonder, “Are you all nuts?” she said laughing.

Seeking the dark places sometimes causes concern, Larson said. She startled relatives when she was shooting photos near the river, she said.

The group also toured Rainy Lake this past fall by Voyageurs National Park boat with members of the Fort Frances Garden Club.

Shuff said the library created a fun project that matched photographs with writings by the local writers’ club. “Pictures and Pens” encourages photog-

raphers, not limited to the club, to submit a photo and writings matching a theme, such as holidays. A winner from each group is chosen and included in a booklet.

While some of the members are more interested in the technical aspects of getting the right shot, others, like Larson, said they enjoy going out and trying to figure it out. But she said she appreciates the members who research techniques and share them with the group. She said her first camera was “a bubble gum” camera obtained by buying bubble gum as a youngster.

Lynn Osse said she enjoys learning programs that allow for manipulation of photographs to create new images. Osse referred to a quote, “photography is an illusion of what a person sees with their eyes.”

Nancy Haugland joined the club after getting a camera and could not use all its capabilities. She said members of the club help one another learn techniques.

What’s apparent at a meeting of Northwoods Shutterbugs is the joy of photography and the love of sharing that joy with others with the same interest.

BOARD

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position involves transparency, and he wants to make sure he’s doing things by the book, Hedlund said. He’s already spoken to two people about the position, with one expressing no interest while the other expressed a lot of interest.

“Those are people that I know, I’m friends with, so that’s my concern is that we have some transparency in this process,” Hedlund said.

The individual Hedlund would recommend to the county board would have all the proper qualifications, he said, which would help assuage concerns about transparency.

“The county board can say ‘OK, this person’s actually qualified to do the job that you’re recommending,’” Hedlund said. “Just so it’s not passed off as ‘oh, this is a friend of the sheriff and he’s trying to get him this contract.’”

Familiarity can be an advantage for the position, Hedlund said. It’s important to have someone he can trust and rely on to get the job done, he said. It’s also critical to make sure the candidate has enough time for the job as it can become a full-time workload, like during the flooding in the early summer of the past year, he said.

“You need someone who does have a little extra time on their hands,” Hedlund said.

Commissioner Brian McBride clarified the contract is with the county and not the sheriff’s office, and the county board would have to approve the person hired for the position. Hedlund is McBride’s son-in-law.

“When you bring somebody forward, if you’re com-



fortable with them, and in an interview with the county board, if we’re comfortable with that person, we would make that decision,” McBride said.

To make sure Hedlund follows the correct process, county Administrative Director Teresa Briggs said he should advertise for the opening, listing the position’s qualification requirements and workload.

“Then that way, you’re covered, because you did your solicitation,” Briggs said. “And if you and the undersheriff do it together, then you take care of all that concern.”

Valuation review

In a committee of the whole session following the regular meeting, the board met with the county Assessor Len Peterson and county Auditor/Treasurer Bob Peterson to discuss the state-ordered valuation review from the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

Briggs said the issue with the valuation review came up during a December public hearing on the 2015 budget and levy. At least two residents spoke up at that time about the increase in the valuation of their property in the city of International Falls, she said.

The 10-percent increase in their property caused a significant increase to their property taxes, Briggs said, about which they were “quite upset.” County staff are familiar with the local

board of equalization process, she said, but the state-level process is unfamiliar territory.

The state-ordered valuation review pertains to a 10-percent increase in properties with a value more than \$50,000, and a 10-percent decrease in properties with a value less than \$50,000.

“That variance of \$2,000 — it just makes no sense,” Briggs said. “And so how does the state justify that scenario?”

Assessor Peterson said the county has had state-mandated increases every year dating back to 2002, except for the last two years.

“I would like to say the reason we haven’t had them is because I’m here, but I don’t know that for sure,” Peterson said. “It might be things lucked out.”

One issue contributing to the state-ordered valuation is the property in Koochiching County not being assessed on a timely basis, Peterson said. The Department of Revenue mandates homes be evaluated every five years, he said, which was not the case when he took over.

“The bottom line, in this county, the issue has been the property has not been looked at in a timely basis,” Peterson said. “I put together a quintile, and as of right now, we have looked at two-thirds of the whole county, and I have this on a five-year schedule.”

The result of not evaluating property in a timely fashion, Peterson said, is “you don’t know what’s going on out there.” The problem then is a \$30,000 home that hasn’t been evaluated in 10 years sells for \$10,000, and the sales ratio is thrown off, he said.

To deal with that issue, Peterson said, the state ordered a decrease in valuation of properties less than \$50,000, and an increase in properties

more than \$50,000. The state also wanted the property in the city of International Falls assessed in one year, which is an unrealistic request, he said. He countered with three years, and both sides settled on two years as a deadline.

“It’s like ‘you’re crazy,’” Peterson said. “We got the flood this year, we got the rest of the county to do.”

Property owners have questioned Peterson about why their property has increased, and cite outside factors like a lagging economy as a reason why the value shouldn’t have increased, he said. But he looks at property valuing through a different lens.

“I understand that, you

know, you look at the economy, and everything else that’s going on, but I see more than that,” Peterson said.

As far as the whole process goes, and the reasoning behind it, Peterson said he’d be happy to meet with people and explain it to them, as he has been doing. There’s a lot of misunderstandings about how the process works and educating people helps clear those up, he said.

McBride said the county board’s main issue with the process is the lack of a forum for the public to contest the increases on their property.

“The state comes along, and increases their value by \$10,000, and they have no recourse,” McBride said. “That

is not fair, that is taxation without representation.”

Peterson said he agrees the process isn’t perfect, and people deserve more of a chance to voice their concerns with the process. However, in explaining the situation, he said they have to realize there’s nothing he can change about it.

“We owe it to the people to explain all that to them,” Peterson said. “I can explain it to you, and hopefully you’ll see it, but I can’t tell the state not to do it.”

This state-mandated valuation review isn’t unique to International Falls and Koochiching County, and occurs statewide each year, Peterson said.

COLD

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the final say — any day — to keep their children home.

“Parents have the right to make that call more than we do,” he said. “And we will respect that.”

Students who are kept home because of a weather-related issue will not have an absence counted against them, he added.

Independent School District No. 361 has a three-part system to determine school closings due to weather: road surface conditions, visibility, and actual air temperature. Common sense dictates if the roads are iced over and there is little opportunity to gravel and salt on the bus routes, school will close regardless of temperature and visibility. By the same token, if the roads are clear and dry, but visibility is under a quarter of

mile, school would be close regardless of temperature.

Temperature is the most difficult criterion to use, according to the policy. It says if there is an air temperature of negative 40 degrees or colder — not including a wind chill — school will be closed.

But how cold is too cold? “Is there really a different between 40 below and 45 below?” Grover said. “Or even 45 below and 50 below? From our standpoint...there isn’t much of an increased risk.”

On the same note, the superintendent said making the decision to close school is not just about a temperature reading. He said there are some students who might miss out on a meal if the school shuts down.

“We have a lot of students who rely on us for breakfast,” he said. “If we announce a two-hour delay, that student might not eat breakfast that day. And they

count on us for structure and a warm place to be during the day. We have to consider those circumstances, too.”

Better weather forecasting has made it easier to make a school closing decision, and automated phone calls and social media can get the word out faster than ever.

“We try to give people as much warning as we can,” Grover said, adding the importance of parents giving the school their current phone number.

All in all, Grover couldn’t stress enough the need for parents to dress their children appropriately when sending them to school during the winter months.

“Be ready,” he said. “When it’s cold out, dress you child for the weather. A lot of the elementary kids are bundled up, but we need the older students to dress warmly, too.”

GOLD DAYS... Hot Deals

At The Jug Liquors 1/10 - 1/17

Miller Lite
24 pack cans
\$17⁹⁹

Angry Orchard
12 pack bottles
\$14⁹⁹

Coors Light
24 pack 16 oz. Cans
\$18⁹⁹

Phillips Vodka
1.75
\$12⁹⁹

Molson Canadian
24 pack cans
\$17⁹⁹

E & J Brandy
1 Liter
\$9⁹⁹

McAdams Whiskey
1.75
\$13⁹⁹

Gallo Wines
1.5
2/\$15

Sutter Home
1.5
2/\$15

Don't Forget The Bar Supplies!

The Jug Liquors

Borderland's Local Liquor Store
Hwy 53 & 11th St. - M.-Sat. 8am-10pm

Limited to stock on hand.