

All about the beards

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EDA urges RLMC Board to return to table

Commission urges board to renew effort toward hospital integration with Essentia

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

The International Falls Economic Development Authority Commission is asking the Rainy Lake Medical Center Board to renew integration talks with Essential Health representatives.

EDA President Gail Rognerud and Commissioners Pete Kalar and Cynthia Jaksa voted in favor of the action, which includes a request

the board consider a mediation process if needed to move toward integrating the hospital into Essentia's system.

Commissioner Bob Anderson was absent from a portion of the discussion and the vote, citing a conflict of interest as a member of the RLMC Board, and Commissioner Paul Eklund abstained from the vote, saying as a hospital employee he is too close to the issue. The EDA Commission is made

up of the International Falls City Council.

The EDA Commission heard from its advisory board concern negotiations leading from affiliation toward full integration between the board and Duluth-based Essentia Health have been mutually ended in August.

Rognerud, a member of the board, told the commission board members have voiced concern about the lack of an integrated hospital and are also hearing concerns about the issue from members of the community.

Kalar said he, too, has heard

concern from residents and said a full-service hospital is an important asset for a community seeking economic development opportunities.

Before leaving the meeting, Anderson asked if the advisory board had been told full integration of the hospital with Essentia had the potential to see up to 26 jobs lost locally to Duluth.

Other commissioners said they had never been told that, and said because of confidentiality agreements cited by board members, little — other than media reports — is known about what was dis-

cussed behind closed doors during integration talks.

Rognerud cited an August news report in which Dan Nikcevich, president of Essentia Health East, said Essentia offered an employment guarantee for all jobs for two years.

Anderson asked what would happen after two years. He told The Journal Tuesday he believed when the job loss might begin was "something negotiable."

Anderson said the potential number of local job loss was

EDA to A7 ➤

Calm before the storm

KCCS director calls working medical assistance provider a 'nightmare'

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

As Minnesotans prepare to embrace the Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare, Koochiching County officials Tuesday expressed concern and frustration about health care coverage.

Nearly all U.S. residents will be required to have health insurance when coverage begins Jan. 1. MNsure, the state's version of President Barack Obama's health care law, opens for enrollment Tuesday.

Qualifying residents who are currently enrolled in or will apply for medical assistance through the county will no longer have three providers from which to choose for a health insurance plan. Instead, they will be required to be serviced by UCare, a company that until July, was not used by the county because of access issues.

"UCare is not going to work in our county," said Terry Murray, director of the county's Commu-

nity Services Department.

County commissioners agreed to send a letter to Lucinda Jesson, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Gov. Mark Dayton and local lawmakers in an effort to establish another provider to service the county's medical assistance clients.

Murray was unsure whether the letter would do any good after he was told it was too late to reverse the decision.

"I don't want to get client's hopes up," he said of the letter. "But if there is even a 1 percent chance it will help, I think it is worth a try."

In August, Murray informed the board that the Minnesota Department of Human Services would not be asking Medica and Blue Plus, the county's current health care providers, to supply coverage for Koochiching County clients. Murray explained UCare is the least used plan by the county's medical assistance clients because of transportation issues. During the August meeting, Murray said he would wait for more information from the state on the issue.

"I've got some bad news," Murray said at the beginning of his update Tuesday.

Health to A7 ➤

Borderland could see more hunger with cuts

While food stamp cut unlikely to become law, agencies that assist the hungry brace for impact

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Borderland residents who receive food stamps, and the agencies that assist them, could feel the impact of a plan approved by the U.S. House last week that would cut \$40 billion from the food stamp program over the next 10 years.

And while many people, including Pres. Barack Obama, said the bill isn't likely to become law, the plan would also restrict people's eligibility for food stamps and allow states to require food stamp recipients to be tested for drugs. Republican House leaders are now expected to begin negotiations with Senate Democrats over a final version of the bill.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, nearly 4 million people would be removed from the program under the bill starting next year.

Locally, the Falls Hunger Coalition Director Nancy Anderson said the cuts will have a harsh effect on many young and old members of the community. The coalition operates the Falls Food Shelf.

"It will always affect people that can least afford to have any support cut," she said. "And it will affect the food shelf, most certainly."

Now, she said an individual receiving the minimal support can receive \$19 per month. "You can get a bit of food for that," she said, "but those people may not qualify for anything under this plan."

Terry Murray, director of Koochiching County Community Services Department, said his department will be impacted. The department administers assistance programs like food stamps, officially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known

Food stamps to A7 ➤



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAUREL BEAGER

Falls High students carry a sign in Friday's parade celebrating 100 years of Bronco football

FHS 2013 homecoming

Bronco football celebrated 100 years as well as Falls High School homecoming Friday. Several events marked the day, including a parade featuring all grades of Falls students.



Sporting Bronco purple, the FHS band lead the parade.



The FHS football team rides in style during the parade.