

LOCALNEWS

Local gas prices down to \$2.34

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have fallen 8.6 cents in the past week, averaging \$2.44 per gallon Sunday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota. This compares with the national average that has decreased 8.3 cents in the last week to \$2.57 per gallon, according to gasoline price website MinnesotaGasPrices.com.

Regular gas prices in International Falls ranged from \$2.34 to \$2.49 per gallon, according to the site.

Including the change in gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, prices Sunday were 53 cents per gallon lower compared to the same day one year ago and are 40.2 cents per gallon

lower than a month ago. The national average has decreased 33.2 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 67 cents per gallon lower than this day one year ago.

"By (Tuesday), more stations in the U.S. will be charging under \$2.50 per gallon than over, a remarkable milestone," said Patrick DeHaan, senior petroleum analyst with GasBuddy. "In fact, as of Sunday evening, the number of states that saw at least one station at \$1.99 or less had jumped to 13 from just three a week ago, and included Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia. As of midday Sunday, all 48 lower U.S. states saw averages under \$3 per

gallon, with New York being the last of the lower 48 to join. Motorists are saving \$270 million dollars every day versus pump prices a year ago, but motorists using the GasBuddy app are saving even more- an additional 10-30 cents per gallon- as the difference between stations widens as gas prices fall at varying rates," he noted.

GasBuddy.com is a tool to help motorists save money at the pump by collecting gas price data and displaying it on websites and on a free smartphone app that has been downloaded over 37 million times. The site operates MinnesotaGasPrices.com and more than 250 similar websites that track gasoline prices at more than 140,000 gasoline stations in the United States and Canada.

Hotline provides support during the holidays

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

While the holidays can be a happy time for many, there are those who find them stressful, hectic, and/or lonely.

One community organization serving northern Minnesota is there to lend a helping hand, or ear, to be more accurate.

First Call for Help 211 of Itasca County is a private, nonprofit community organization, whose mission is to provide free, confidential and nonjudgmental crisis intervention, active listening, and information and referral services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to the residents and agencies of north central Minnesota, according to its website.

First Call provides services in Koochiching County and the other northern Minnesota counties including Aitkin, Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Itasca, Koochiching and Lake of the Woods.

First Call works as the initial point of contact for agencies like Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon and Alateen, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, the Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross and other support groups and hotlines. It also provides after-hours coverage for many local agencies and services like Itasca County Health and Human Services, to handle certain aspects of their assistance programs.

According to its website, the organization's goal is to provide in-home, in-community crisis intervention, referral and mental health stabilization. One way the group achieves this is through the Itasca County Crisis Response team, who is accessible at all hours through First Call.

The team is comprised of

Eight tips to help someone grieving during the holidays

For many people, the holiday season is a special time of year marked by celebrations and gatherings with family and friends. For those struggling with the death of a loved one, the holidays may be a difficult time full of painful reminders that emphasize their sense of loss.

Often, friends and family members of those affected by a loss are unsure how to act or what to say to support their grieving loved one during the holidays.

Hospice professionals, who are experienced at helping people deal with grief and loss, distributed a release to offer some suggestions:

- Be supportive of the way the person chooses to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow traditions; others may choose to avoid customs of the past and do something new. It's okay to do things differently.
- Offer to help the person with decorating or holiday baking. Both tasks can be overwhelming for someone who is grieving.
- Offer to help with holiday shopping. Share catalogs or online shopping sites that may be helpful.
- Invite the person to join you or your family during the holidays. You might invite them to join you for a religious service or at a holiday meal where they are a guest.
- Ask the person if he or she is interested in volunteering with you during the holidays. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at a soup kitchen or working with children, may help your loved one feel better about the holidays.
- Never tell someone that he or she should be "over it." Instead, give the person hope that, eventually, he or she will enjoy the holidays again.
- Be willing to listen. Active listening from friends and family is an important step to helping some cope with grief and heal.
- Remind the person you are thinking of him or her and the loved one who died. Cards, phone calls and visits are great ways to stay in touch.

mental health professionals who can provide crisis intervention service as well as consultation services to professionals in the community. Funding for the group is made available through a joint effort between the county and state Departments of Health and Human Services.

Team members hope to help people cope and, if necessary, help people connect with a therapist for ongoing assistance. According to its website, they will assist if a person is feeling suicidal, having difficulty with medications, experiencing behavioral problems, con-

templating psychiatric hospitalization, or experiencing other emotional problems. Callers can contact the team at 218-326-8565 or 800-442-8565.

The organization is part of a partnership with the Greater Twin Cities United Way/211 in the metro area, as well as four other regions throughout the state. Nationally, 211 is assigned by the Federal Communications Commission for human services information and referral. Information and referral centers have developed in response, with funding sources varying depending on location.

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Improve your energy efficiency

The Minnesota Department of Commerce has resources and tips to help you stay warm

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Struggling to pay winter utility bills? Looking to improve energy efficiency?

Visit the Stay Warm Minnesota webpage, www.staywarm.mn.gov, a resource provided by the Minnesota Department of Commerce, to help Minnesota families experience a safe and comfortable winter, and prevent home heating bills from overtaking the family budget. The webpage has information for consumers — especially low-income residents — seeking help to stay warm this winter.

Stay Warm Minnesota includes resources on financial assistance, energy efficiency, and heating safety programs. Links to nonprofit groups and government sources are listed, along with publications and tips for saving energy. Find information

about the Cold Weather Rule under "Finding Financial Assistance" and learn how customers can prevent having their heat shut off if they agree to and keep a payment plan with their utility. You can also find instructions on how to apply for financial assistance to pay heating bills through the state's Energy Assistance Program, other government agencies, utilities, and charitable organizations.

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