

Have a safe and happy Easter



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## MENTAL HEALTH

# Community resources can't keep up with demand

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

This is the second part of a three-part series on the mental health crisis facing doctors, law enforcement officials, human services professionals and lawmakers in Minnesota. Due to a lack of resources, they're trying to help the overwhelming, growing number of people with mental health issues.

They're fighting the problem with one hand tied behind their back.

This part focuses on doctors and human services professionals in Koochiching County, and what they're doing to find a solution. They'll also provide some insight into what caused this mess in the first place.

If you had a leaky pipe under your kitchen sink, would you fix it right away?

Or would you try to ignore the drip, drip, drip, until it got so bad you had to do something about it?

But, you ignored it too long. Now the kitchen cabinets have to be replaced, the floor has to be torn out and redone, and the whole process is more invasive and more expensive than it would have been had you just called a plumber in the first place.

It's not a perfect metaphor, but it's a description of the situation

Minnesota finds itself in in trying to help the growing number of people with mental health issues who, because of a lack of resources and attention, aren't getting the care they need.

The problem didn't start in the past few years, though. It's the result of a shifting attitude toward mental health that began decades ago.

### Background

Jeff Hardwig, psychiatrist at

the Essentia Health-International Falls clinic, has been working locally for more than 20 years. He's also worked with the local Northland Counseling Center, giving him first-hand knowledge about how mental health has evolved over the years.

"I'm an older psychiatrist, right, so I've been around the block a couple times," Hardwig said.

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## Fifth grade returns to St. Thomas

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Fourth-grade students attending a local Catholic school will have another year before they have to enter the public school system.



Rev. Ben  
Hadrich

St. Thomas School officials this week said fifth grade will be added back into the school's offerings next year.

"We're very excited to bring fifth grade back," said Dawn Flesland, the school's principal. "We are not withering away. We are growing."

The decision to include fifth grade comes a little more than a year since the school decided to eliminate grades 5-8 in an effort to ensure future stability of the school that was experiencing a declining enrollment.

Flesland admitted last year she was concerned the school had hit rock bottom and was unsure if it would be able to come up for air. "I wasn't sure we'd be able to maintain enough to stay open," she said.

Then, things started to turn around.

The Rev. Ben Hadrich became the head pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in July and set goals to focus some of his energy on the success of the school.

"When I have a goal, I do whatever I can to achieve it," he said.

He said he wasn't crazy about ridding the school's top four grades, however, he understood the school was strapped with limited options at the time and decisions had to be made. However, he said now is the time to get up, dust themselves off and make improvements.

He, Flesland and the school's advisory board explored ways to make the school more affordable.

"If there's a will, there's a way," said Betsy Meres, chair of the

St. Thomas to A7 ►



## PLAYFUL PERFORMANCE

With members from both sides of the border, The Border River Band performs Wednesday during lunch at the Koochiching Senior Center.



Jack Bissonette plays the clackers Wednesday.



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAUREL BEAGER

Above: Don Hughes gives a wink as he plays the accordion.

Top: Members of the Border River Band include, from the left, Carol Smith and Bob Smith, from International Falls; Bob Wepruk and Jack Bissonette from Fort Frances, and, outside of this photo is Don Hughes.

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