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Husband and wife are dynamic duo

New surgeon and first assistant have close connection

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

In the tense, high-stress, sanitized operating room, familiarity between a surgeon and her assistants can literally be the difference between life and death, success and failure.

Fortunately for Borderland residents who need to go under the knife, the new general surgeon and first surgical assistant at Rainy Lake Medical Center are so close, they often know what the other is thinking.

Dr. Heather Cook and Eric Wooll don't only share a operating room, they share a home as well.

The husband and wife team recently relocated to International Falls, with Cook serving as the general surgeon at RLMC and Wooll as her first assistant.

The two came as a package deal, Cook said. When the hospital began recruiting her, she let them know if they hired her, they were also getting a top-notch surgical assistant, as well.

"When they were looking to hire me, I said, 'You know, I come as a team,'" Cook said. "We have to move together or we don't move at all."

RLMC CEO Dan Odegaard said he was initially surprised at the arrangement, but previous

experience working with married professionals gave him familiarity with the routine.

"In rural health care you have to be open to the idea of potentially hiring the candidate's spouse, especially if it's a critical position you're trying to fill, as it can be difficult for a spouse to find a job in a smaller community," Odegaard said. "Dr. Cook's husband, Eric, has already demonstrated his value and expertise to RLMC and we are very happy to have him."

Coming to RLMC as a team has been an added bonus for a hospital



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

Eric Wooll, left, and his wife Dr. Heather Cook have already brought added value to the Rainy Lake Medical Center surgical department, RLMC CEO Dan Odegaard said.

Duo to A7 ➤



Hayden Kimball died when she was 16-months-old after aspirating on her own saliva while sleeping. Hayden had been diagnosed with Angelman syndrome shortly before her death and now her mother, Rebecca, is organizing a walk to raise money for Angelman research.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

HONORING HAYDEN

Local woman organizes walk to bring awareness to rare syndrome

BY EMILY GEDDE | Staff Writer

Rebecca Kimball will never watch her daughter step on the bus for her first day of school. She'll never get to pin up her curly hair and send her off on her first date. She'll never be able to adjust to the diagnosis of a rare genetic disorder her daughter Hayden received just weeks before she died. "She had been diagnosed with Angelman syndrome about a month before she passed," Kimball said, recalling what the doctor

More information

For more information about the walk, contact Rebecca Kimball at 240-5421 or visit www.angelman.org.

People can donate to the cause by visiting the website, clicking on "walk," then clicking "find a team/participant" and type in "Team Hayden."

Angelman to A7 ➤

COUNTY BOARD

Ecklund: Support in DC for sewer project

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Koochiching County Commissioner Rob Ecklund Tuesday briefed fellow members of the county's development authority on meetings with federal lawmakers about their support of the Voyageurs National Park Clean Water Project.

The project involves construction of sewer collection systems in communities adjacent to Minnesota's only national park. The project includes immediate work in the Kabetogama and Island View communities.

Ecklund was in Washington D.C. from Feb. 21-25 for the National Association of Counties conference and met with nine members of Minnesota's congressional delegation and the staff that work for them.

He said Congressman Rick Nolan and Sen. Al Franken and their staff were very engaged and both said they believed federal money would be available for the Kabetogama and Island View sections of the project.

The KDA Board also discussed two proposals from lobbying firms the project's joint powers board, made up of St. Louis and Koochiching county commissioners, will consider contracting with for the project.

In county board business later Tuesday, the board tabled action on a request to rescind a motion

Board to A7 ➤

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