

LOCALNEWS

Police chief addresses driving concerns

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

With the school year approaching, concerns about driving violations near the area's schools were brought to the International Falls City Council Monday.

Councilor Cynthia Jaksa said she had been contacted by a resident who voiced concern about speeding vehicles on 15th Street. She reported vehicles were also disobeying a stop sign there.

Jaksa asked International Falls Police Chief Mike Musich whether tickets will be issued for speed and stop sign violations.

Musich told the council citations are given at the discretion of officers, who consider past driving history and other details involved in the violation.

But he said the 11 officers now on the police force — two less than when he became chief in 2009 — are being asked to do more with less manpower.

He said with 275 stop signs in the city and two officers patrolling at a time on shifts equates to 140 stop signs for each officer to monitor, which he called a mathematical improbability.

He said officers are tied up with numerous arrests and keeping a handle on major crime in the area. "We will watch to the

best of our ability," he said, and then made a plea for additional officers.

"We can't provide the same service with two less officers," said Musich, who later added the city saved \$160,000 to \$180,000 by eliminating two officer positions from the department.

Falls Mayor Bob Anderson said the chief is aware of driving concerns, including speeding in the 13th street and avenue areas, and said he knows officers are giving tickets to speeders.

Anderson said he hoped Musich would ask for additional officers in the next budget cycle.

In related business, Musich addressed comments made about the number of sergeants on the police department. He said the department has four shifts, which are each led by a sergeant.

He said the sergeants are paid \$1.35 per hour more "to make important decisions on the shift."

In addition, he reported 40 officers with U.S. Customs and Border Protection would be conducting required nighttime shooting at the police department's range off Highway 332. He urged the council to contact him if residents voiced complaints or concerns about the shooting, which is expected to occur in the next two weeks.

Council discusses application process

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

RANIER — The Ranier City Council Monday discussed how eligible homeowners can start applying to receive funds from a grant the city recently received.

The \$337,000 Small Cities Development Program grant the city received through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is designed to help people with low and moderate incomes pay for housing rehabilitation projects.

Dana Herschbach from KOOTASCA Community Action explained the pre-applications have been

sent to those in the target area, and he will return Aug. 30 to collect the applications. They will be evaluated in the order they were turned in, with priority given to those in most need. If funds remain after the target area has been processed, the application process can be expanded to those in Ranier proper. The target area for the grant is the 2010 water replacement project, which is the French and Jamestown area, City Clerk Kim Nuthak explained to The Journal.

The income limit for qualified households is 80 percent of the federal poverty line, Herschbach said, which is about

\$35,000 per year for a single family. The application will use the last two annual income tax statements to determine eligibility. Herschbach noted KOOTASCA would also look for recommendations on local contractors, instead of bringing in an out-of-town company to do the improvements.

In other business, an item involving replacing a dock on County Road 21 was tabled after Nuthak explained an official survey was needed before Koochiching County officials would disperse any funds to build a new dock. The city needs to make sure the dock is built on public land and not infringing on pri-

vate property, she said. The neighboring property belongs to Terry Woods and Tony Cole, who serves as a Ranier councilor.

"We don't know where (the private) property line is, and where our property line is, because it's never been surveyed, so we're not 100 percent sure," Nuthak said.

Resident Arden Barnes voiced her concern that before the council takes bids on building the dock, they should make sure it's certified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"That's so the person who's bidding knows what the expectations are," Barnes said.

Klobuchar, Collins respond to Lyme disease

Senators seek to prevent spread of disease

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Susan Collins this week called on the administration to take swift action to prevent and respond to Lyme disease.

A report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that diagnoses of Lyme disease are 10 times higher than cases reported annually. Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Collins, R-Maine, wrote

to Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius urging the agency to use all available resources to improve diagnostic tools and ramp up efforts to prevent the spread of the disease.

Earlier this year, Klobuchar and Collins urged the Food and Drug Administration to alleviate a shortage of a drug used to treat infectious diseases like Lyme disease.

"This report underscores the need to take action to better prevent and respond to Lyme disease," Klobuchar said in a statement. "We need to do everything in our power to expand and

boost efforts to ensure that the public, health care providers, educators and others are doing everything possible to prevent the spread of this disease."

"According to our state epidemiologist, the number of Maine residents diagnosed with Lyme disease continues to increase each year," Collins said. "This alarming new report from the CDC illustrates just how widespread this dis-



Amy Klobuchar

ease actually is and makes clear the immediate need for improved diagnostic tools and prevention efforts."

Both Minnesota and Maine have high incidences of tick-borne illnesses. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 96 percent of Lyme disease cases in 2011 were reported from 13 states, including Minnesota and Maine. The CDC's new report indicated that the number of Americans diagnosed with Lyme disease each year is approximately 300,000 — 10 times higher than the 30,000 cases reported annually.

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Midwest sees highest gasoline prices

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have risen 2.2 cents in the past week, averaging \$3.50 per gallon Thursday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota. This compares with the national average that has decreased 0.4 cents per gallon in the last week to \$3.57 per gallon, according to gasoline price website MinnesotaGasPrices.com.

Prices in International Falls Sunday averaged \$3.59 per gallon, according to the website.

Including the change in gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, prices Sunday were 20.2 cents per gallon lower compared to the same day one year ago and are 14.6 cents per gallon lower than a month ago. The national average has decreased 10.8 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 13 cents per gallon lower than this day one year ago.

"Americans are now shelling out \$50 million less per day than they were last year when pump prices averaged 13 cents more per gallon," said GasBuddy.com Senior Petroleum Analyst Patrick DeHaan. "Most states are seeing their average below last year, and as summer slowly fades, gasoline prices may as well in many communities. Cooler weather typically brings relief as demand declines and discretionary travel ebbs. I expect that pump prices may drift lower over the next few days, much

focus remains on the tropics," DeHaan said.

WHAT OTHER CITIES ARE PAYING

GasBuddy looked into which communities are paying the highest and lowest gas prices.

"While major markets like Los Angeles, New York and Chicago get much of the attention and criticism, they're not even in the top 20 among cities that see the steepest price hikes," DeHaan said.

"The steep price hikes recorded in more than 25 cities in the Midwest dwarf the increases seen in the rest of the country. And nowhere is it worse than Ft. Wayne, Ind. So far this year, Fort Wayne has recorded the highest single day average price hike — 34 cents per gallon — among its three highest daily changes. It is followed by: Indianapolis, Dayton, OH; Columbus, OH; and Toledo, OH," said DeHaan.

He emphasized in a release that the figures represent the average of the three highest single-day price spikes and that Midwesterners have seen more than 30-cent increases often enough to know they're not a statistical anomaly.

On the west coast, Bakersfield, Calif., had the largest increase in its single-day prices — taking the average of the highest three daily spikes — with a nine-cent gain. In the Rocky Mountains region, Colorado Springs led the list with an 11-cent single day spike. The Gulf Coast region's

highest single-day spike was recorded in Lubbock TX, while on the East Coast it was Myrtle Beach, S.C., posting an 11-cent increase to lead that region.

GasBuddy examined frequency of price changes too and found that the Midwest and West Coast regions led the way with the number of days that prices changed a penny or more per gallon. Nationwide, stations in Stockton, Calif., have posted 72 days of price changes over a penny per gallon since Jan. 1, while Jackson, Miss., Memphis, Tenn., and New Haven, Conn., have all recorded 67 increases of 1 cent or more.

"While small cities lead the way among markets with the steepest price spikes, we saw some larger Midwestern cities like Chicago, Milwaukee and Detroit positioned prominently among the leaders for days with one cent or more price increases (see maps for more information), and that undoubtedly fuels consumer anxiety in places where there's plenty already," said Gregg Laskoski, another senior petroleum analyst with GasBuddy.

"But when we look at the number of days with average price decreases of more than a penny, we see the Midwestern cities more than doubling every other region in the country," DeHaan noted, "and it's the downside of that roller coaster ride that consumers easily forget. We complain about the higher highs, but we're quiet when we benefit from the lower lows."

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