

FROSTED APPLES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saturday’s weather brought a layer of hoar frost creating a magical appearance on some trees around Borderland. Local photographer Kallie Kantos-Fritz shared this photo of the frost on crabapples.

With landfill fund loan, state costs piled up

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Taking from the trash has wound up costing Minnesota big bucks. Custodians of the state treasury forked out \$61 million this year _ and owe about \$40 million over the next few years _ to repay a loan half that size from the state’s Closed Landfill Investment Fund. The fund is administered by pollution regulators to pay for programs that ensure proper environmental attention is given to more than 100 closed landfills. The \$48 million loan was ordered by lawmakers in 2010, to help dig out from a steep budget deficit. As part of an agreement put into law then, the loan was to be repaid with interest that matched any investment earnings the fund missed out on as a result. As they released a budget forecast last week that showed a \$1 billion projected budget surplus, finance officials pointed to the loan repayment as a rare area where costs were climbing more than they were counting on. The reason? Stocks and bonds that the fund invested in boomed amid a market recovery from the Great Recession. “I don’t think any of us realized at the time that it

was 100 percent invested in the stock market. And the stock market did very well,” Minnesota Management and Budget Commissioner Jim Schowalter told the House Ways and Means Committee on Friday. Legislators and then-Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s administration were drawn to the fund because they exhausted other options, and the money wasn’t slated to be used for remediation until 2020 and beyond, said Sen. Richard Cohen, DFL-St. Paul and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. The move helped stave off other cuts at the time. “There wasn’t \$50 million from someplace else,” Cohen said. “At that point we had been looking everywhere. We tried to make things as palatable as we could in 2010 in a bad situation.” He said the extent of the potential windfall wasn’t anticipated and could get a second look from the Legislature in the upcoming session. The loan is being repaid in four installments, with the one already made this year accounting for the biggest. At least \$38 million in principal remains _ to be spread roughly evenly over the next three years.

The amount of interest on that could change, but is expected to top \$5 million. At the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, planners are banking on lawmakers following through on their commitment. The fund had less than \$4 million until the recent installment. It must balloon in size to cover the estimated \$173 million need over the next three decades for care of landfills after they close, said Kirk Koudelka, assistant commissioner of legislative affairs, land and solid waste policy. The fund was started, in part, with money drawn from solid-waste taxes that customers pay on their garbage bills. “This is important work,” Koudelka said. “These landfills don’t go away. The trash we throw away _ there are long-term repercussions. And to protect the public we need the long-term care of these facilities.” As for lawmakers, the deal drives home the cost of deferring budget pain. Cohen said there’s a lesson for the Legislature. “Try to be a little bit careful about borrowing money from various funds because at some point you’ve got to pay them back,” he said.

VOYAGE FORWARD

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important to residents and business owners that live and work here what they would like the future to look like. This group will ask average citizens throughout the region four questions that will remain top secret for now, he said. “The questions will help the engagement team identify issues most important to our community,” he said. “It’s a chance for folks to talk about what they like, don’t like and what they would change.” Wellcome said he’s ready to start on the effort. “I can’t wait, I want to jump forward and look at it,” he said. He encouraged people to visit the website to find out who those people are that will ask the four questions and seek them out. “This is an opportunity for your unfiltered sugges-

tions and concerns to be heard,” he said. The outcome of asking the questions will be designing a more in-depth process to identify the issues important to the county, and individual cities or areas within the county. “Those will be our destiny drivers,” he said. “They will be the actionable items that residents and leaders in the community can take on to make this a community of choice and a great place to live.” Members of the newly formed Buzz Team want to create a buzz around the community, Wellcome said. Members are charged with increasing the profile of Voyage Forward and serve as the public relations and marketing effort. The original long-term vision and strategy team has morphed into what’s now known as the Asset Team, Wellcome said. This team is charged with managing a group of consultants that will visit in January to conduct in-depth research on how the

community can better compete through an economic assessment of what is available and what is missing. An industry analysis to identify potential industries that may be a good fit based on the community assets will also be conducted, he said. This team will also complete an inventory of the workforce to provide information on numbers of people with certain skills, Wellcome said. “The economic development folks armed with that information can sell the community,” he said. “Everybody has land, but not everybody has the skills to be a welder. It’s a great resource to have in your back pocket when trying to sell this community.” Another team is planning a retail analysis to identify areas that may provide opportunity for business group. A number of initiatives are underway to help local businesses grow, which Wellcome called “very cool.”

DRIVERS

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cities,” he said. “I don’t see an advantage to it.” As more people become aware of the law, Ditsch said there is a rush to get in required training before the new law takes effect. “I’m booking weekends and after school every night,” he said. “Students are students and they feel its ridiculous to do more time.” Tony Casareto, owner of Falls Driving School, thinks the new law will change the way families look at learning to drive. “It’s going to ensure their child is getting adequate time behind the wheel,” Casareto said. “But, parents will need to become more involved.” Tthe veteran driving instructor is unsure, however, whether parents will be on board with the class. “I took a survey of kids in my class right now and not one of them said their parents would take the class,” he said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading cause of death for teens is fatal crashes. The new requirements hope to cut down on the number of wrecks reported annually. Last year, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety reported there were 12,384 crashes caused by Minnesota teen drivers. The crashes resulted in 38 deaths and 8,784 injuries. While Casareto is unsure how he feels about the new law, he said he is hopeful parents will take an active role in participating in the class. He said when he is in a vehicle with a driving student, he sees the specific difficulties they experience. By having parents take a class, Casareto said he can relay to them factors that will produce safer drivers. “The biggest issue is distracted driving, especially with cell phone use,” he said. “A lot of kids say their parents do the same thing. The key factor is setting a good example.” The Journals’ Facebook

readers also had varied vies of the law change. “I don’t have a teenager yet, but seriously think this is needed,” Jaci Klaphake wrote of the new requirements. “There are more distractions out than when we were kids.” Kelly Barg said it’s the kids who need more training, not the parents. “My time is stretched to the limit as it is,” she wrote. “Then I have to find time for a class...totally disagree...I think the extra time for kids is a great idea.” Casareto said he understands time is precious, but added teaching a safe driver is important, too. “I know people have busy lives,” he said. “But I am hopeful they will take the 90-minute class and take an active role in making their child a better driver.” Casareto will offer the first parent class for free Jan. 27. The class will run from 6:30-8 p.m. in room 115 at Falls High School. Depending on participation, he said he may offer three our four classes each year.

BUDGET

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tation backlog, but it’s better than doing nothing at all,” Bakk said. “We need to be careful so we don’t slip into the deficit cycle again.” Dill said he anticipates there will be some legislators who push to use the surplus for all-new programs. “Not me,” Dill said. “There may be some things that deserve a closer look, but we have to live within our means and we made the right adjustments in the last two years.” Bakk said he’s already considering money needs of the state. He said he’ll meet this week with Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie Gildea to talk

about a request for new money in the court’s budget, and he believes more money must be found for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources forestry and parks divisions. “We can’t cut wood if we don’t have enough foresters putting paint on the trees,” he said. “The forestry budget needs a few more million. I guess you call it inflation.” Meanwhile, Dill will serve in a Republican-dominated House and he said he looks forward to the start of the session. “I get along very well with the Republicans,” he said. “They have, I suspect, a rural agenda they will want to implement and I will make sure that will benefit us.”

Bakk said the Republican-dominated House will bring challenges, but he said he has a good relationship with House Speaker-designate Kurt Daudt, R-Crown. “He’s a pretty good guy,” Bakk said. Natural resources issues should see cooperation between Republicans and DFLers, he said. Bakk said Dill and others in the state have been working to make changes to the wetland laws. “I expect something pretty significant will probably happen on wetlands,” Bakk said. “Restoring wetlands in Koochiching County if you build something doesn’t make a lot of sense, when elsewhere it could be used for flood mitigation or something like that.”

DECEMBER SAVINGS

at the JUG LIQUORS

Saturday, Dec. 6th – Saturday, Dec. 13th



Coors Light
16 oz
24 pk cans
\$18⁹⁹



Miller High Life & Miller High Life Light
24 pk cans
\$14⁹⁹



Absolut Vodka
1.75 L
\$24⁹⁹



Gallo Family Wines
1.5 L
All Flavors
2 for \$16!!



Black Box Wine
3 Liter Box All Flavors
\$15⁹⁹



Paul Masson Brandy
1.75 L
\$16⁹⁹



Miller Lite and Michelob Golden Light
12 Pack Bottles
\$9⁹⁹





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Tasting Friday, Dec. 12th
3-6 PM
Hosted by Dusty with
Southern Wine and Spirits



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