

LOCALNEWS

Littlefork City Council terminates administrator/liquor store manager

Mike Fairchild said he would appeal the action

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The Littlefork City Council voted unanimously Aug. 21 to terminate Mike Fairchild as city administrator/liquor store manager.

The action followed a closed meeting Aug. 7 which was continued on Aug. 21.

A report about the action was provided to The Journal listing six findings of severe infractions, among them allowing an unpermitted liquor booth/concession stand of the Littlefork Municipal Liquor store at the Littlefork Fairgrounds during the Northern Minnesota District Fair.

Fairchild said he plans to appeal the action and declined further comment.

The city has scheduled a public hearing at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday when Fairchild will appeal the disciplinary action. The meeting will be held at Littlefork City Hall.

Littlefork Mayor Mike Fort said he would not comment.

A Littlefork City Council meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday to consider advertising the administrator and liquor store manager position or positions as well as other city business.

The first finding claims Fairchild was contacted by city officials about open vodka

hidden on shelves in the office/storage room of the liquor store building.

The report said that no actions to monitor such incidents were undertaken in a timely manner. In addition, the report says that an open bottle of liquor was found at the Littlefork Fairgrounds July 10 in a bank deposit bag Fairchild used when he and an employee were setting up a liquor store concession stand there.

The second finding claims that Fairchild did not obtain a temporary liquor permit at the Littlefork Fairgrounds as required by law and did not inform council members of the July 10 incident when the lack of permit was discussed with them July 18. The findings note that Fairchild had in 2011, obtained the permit “but did not even apply to the state until Aug. 5, 2013, after being warned of disciplinary action being considered.” The city reports that the permit should have been submitted to the state immediately upon approval of the license in June and at least on July 10 before setting up the concession stand.

“No action can condone the illegal sale of liquor each time an alcoholic beverage was sold from July 12 through July 14 at the fairgrounds by employees under Michael Fairchild’s discretion and supervision whether

he was present or not,” states the document.

Other findings of infractions involve claims of a failure for more than two years to react to the council’s direction to purchase cash registers and adopt policies about liquor story inventory to allow tracking until very recently after notice of discipline was provided.

The findings say that the council has been dissatisfied with Fairchild’s performance as city liquor store manger and listed six specific issues which it said had been previously specified to Fairchild.

The city alleges that Fairchild neglected to provide packets of information to council members in a timely manner prior to meetings, causing the canceling of a meeting scheduled for July 18. The document says that the issue was raised March 21 and had been brought to Fairchild’s attention for many months previous to March 21.

The final finding claims that Fairchild failed as of July 29 to respond, despite being told by the council for at least two months and despite three warnings, to an economic census report due Feb. 12. It also said that Fairchild failed as of July 29, despite being told by the council for at least two months, to prepare or file documents regarding cigarette floor stocks tax.



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

Two local kids enjoy a free lunch at Backus Community Center Wednesday. The Summer Food Service program wrapped up Friday.

Meal program sees increases

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Summer Food Service program at Backus Community Center served its last meal for the summer on Friday after setting a record for the number of meals served during the summer.

The program began in June 2010, and has run June through August each summer since then. The number of meals served each summer has steadily climbed, according to Backus Executive Director Ward Merrill. The first summer the program served 3,031 meals, and this summer it served more than 7,300.

“We average 108 meals per day, and we’ve gotten up to 150 meals on our peak days, based on the weather and the menu,” he said.

The program is sponsored and supported by the Minnesota Department of Education and the United States Department of Agriculture. It’s designed to continue a school lunch program for kids during

the summer months, Merrill said.

“It’s meant to provide a seamless source of nutritious meals through the summer months,” he said. “Kid’s don’t learn without something to eat.”

Open gym time is also provided for the kids through funding from the Otto Bremer Foundation. Kids can come get a nutritious meal, and then enjoy some play time in the gym, Merrill said.

In addition to the lunch program, there’s also a Community Cafe program at Backus that provides dinners on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The program began December 2012, offering meals once a week. It expanded to two nights a week in June, and Merrill said the response has been positive.

“There is a real hunger problem in the country with people having access to healthy food,” Merrill said. “We’re helping to meet the demand in the community.”

The menu for the cafe is determined by the cooks,

as well as food service manager Hoa Sobczynski, Merrill said. A variety of items, like barbeque ribs, chicken Caesar salad, chow mein, and brats have helped the program succeed, he said.

“We’ve surveyed people, and the biggest thing they like about the program is that the food is great,” he said. “It’s not often we’ve had the same thing twice.”

The Community Cafe program is a joint venture between the Falls Hunger Coalition and Backus, Merrill said. The funding comes from the coalition, community support, and a \$10,000 grant from the Northland Foundation in Duluth.

“We’re just trying to keep costs down,” he said.

There are currently no plans to expand the program beyond two days a week, Merrill said. The initial impact of the layoffs at the Boise Inc. paper mill are still being felt, he said, and as the impact becomes more apparent, the program may be expanded to meet the demand.



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Fri.	Biscuits & Gravy w/eggs & hashbrowns	
Sat.	Cinnamon Swirl French Toast with ham & eggs	
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