

SNOWMOBILE

► continued from A1

Mater, “I strapped him on and he’s ridden with me since.”

Sheldon Monson, Crystal, said he’s drawn to Live on Skis because he recalls when today’s vintage sleds were coming off the assembly lines.

“Growing up with them and now younger people are being attracted to them,” Monson said. “They’re easy to work on, a lot of them still perform pretty well.”

Monson rode his 1989 Polaris Indy 650 — which he noted just 25 years old and is now considered vintage. “I’ve had it for maybe 10 years, it’s one of the ones you pick up along the way. You never know where you’re going to find them.”

Dale Neduzak came from Beausejour, Manitoba, where he operates Time Benders Vintage Garage, billed on his business card as “Intense Vintage Auto and Snowmobile Restorations.”

He showed off his classic helmet, which he said is an original style worn by the Polaris racers of the 1960s. Each had their name on the helmet and Neduzak followed suit.

“They were my heroes when I was racing,” he said. “They built Polaris snowmobiles in Beausejour, Manitoba, where I grew up. So I am a Polaris guy from day one.”

Neduzak said he got together with Roseau vintage sled folks to attend the Live on Skis ride. He brought to Saturday’s event a 1966 Polaris Mustang, which he kept in a trailer, because he believed it too slow to keep up with Saturday’s ride.

As an unusual machine passed by, Neduzak described it as a 1970s concept twin-track Manta, in which riders sit in it like a car. “You see all sorts of different stuff, rare stuff,” he said of the gathering.

Jim Strandlund, Mora, shut down his 1970 Polaris GX800 — the biggest twin free air motor made with a twin cylinder — machine to talk. He explained that back then, the exhaust system was open megaphones: “That’s why it’s louder than everything else.”

Just prior to the ride, Strandlund donned his Hudson Bay coat and fur hat. “My motto has been: They’re going to hear me coming or see me coming — one of the two,” he said erupting into laughter.

“I love vintage snowmobiles, and more so the camaraderie of the people we meet here,” he said. Strandlund said he would offer gag gifts and make fun of “all these goofy people” at that night’s banquet. A chili feed Friday drew Canadian perogies and moose sausage, he noted.

And Strandlund credited Borderland for some of the success of Live on Skis. “It’s fun to come to such a beautiful area, people here are so nice, the snowmobile club does a hot dog roast and it’s just a friendly atmosphere and a chance to ride relics,” he said.

Strandlund said he grew up riding Evinrudes of the 1960s and 1970s. “It was a family fun sport, and what attracts us again is that we remember that fun time when we had hot dog roasts with family and the genre has come back to that fellowship.”

He noted the average speed on a fun run Friday was 20 miles per hour.

“And that was me,” said Neduzak, of his trailered Mustang.

It was then that Neduzak and Strandlund threw down: “I’ll tune it up and come back next year and blow the doors off you,” challenged Neduzak. And Strandlund replied, prompted by the challenges ranging from singing national anthems to beating hockey teams.

As Strandlund attempted to gather the riders, something similar to herding cats, for a photo before the start of the ride, some of the antiques chased one another around the bay before finally lining up ski to ski. As Strandlund watched one snowmobile join the group, he smiled widely. “There’s Aaron Johnson, the son of Polaris founder David Johnson,” he said. “He’s riding an Arctic Cat.”

Meanwhile, Randy Arnold of the Falls proved that vintage sleds can be a family affair. He rode the 1972 Arctic Cat his mother built while working at the Arctic Cat plant in Thief River Falls. The sled has been in the family since.

He said his family recently gave him the sled, which had been stored in his father’s shed and started at least once a year. “It’s a family heirloom,” he said.

“My brother smashed it up once when we were kids,” he said, his voice muffled from the helmet he wore, but his eyes twinkled from recalling the story. And, he said, brother Corey got in a little trouble as a result.

Seems like just about everybody on the ice Saturday had recollections of snowmobiles from their youth.

Mark Trompeter and Melissa Fuller walked along the parked sleds trading stories about riding snowmobiles.

“I just love old sleds,” said Trompeter. “This is amazing. When I was a kid, dad bought this new 10-horse and I was 7 years old. Started driving it alone when I was 8. This is a blast from the past.”

Riding from International Falls to Kettle Falls in the “old days” was a time-consuming and often dangerous trip, he noted. “Now, they go to Kettle Falls and onto Crane Lake without ever thinking twice,” he said.

FUEL

► continued from A1

“Koochiching County should start to take a look at what happens when multiple people run out (of fuel) — where will you house them?” asked Herschbach.

International Falls Fire Chief Jerry Jensen joined Herschbach at the board table to discuss concerns about fire and carbon monoxide danger as people turn to alternative heat sources as fuel prices increase or they cannot obtain fuel.

International Falls Mayor Bob Anderson sat in on the discussion, as did county Community Services Director Terry Murray.

Gov. Mark Dayton Jan. 27 issued Peacetime State of Emergency in Minnesota in response to a statewide shortage of propane and other heating fuel supplies. In addition, eligibility for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) was expanded from 50 percent to 60 percent of the state’s median income. The increased assistance helps more Minnesotans gain access to financial assistance for the purchase of propane and other heating fuels. The Department of Commerce increased LIHEAP crisis payments from \$500 to \$1,000. Money is still available for those who qualify.

Minnesotans in crisis, including an immediate need for housing due to a lack of heating fuel, are urged by state and local officials to call 911.

“And we may not be at the height of the crisis yet,” said Herschbach. He told the board the issue will be felt in the coming months, and even year, as people who are behind on fuel payments can’t catch up or pay fuel bills instead of rent or mortgages.

Herschbach detailed the number of applicants for energy assistance who have delivered fuels in Koochiching County. He said 148 applicants have delivered fuels; 43 applicants still have \$1,000 in crisis funding available; 57 applicants have \$500 in crisis funding available; and 35 applicants are waiting for application processing and keep getting skipped.

The latter applicants are being skipped, he said, because crisis applications are taking priority.

“This is truly an emergency,” said Commissioner Wade Pavleck, who described meeting a man warming himself inside the



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

International Falls Fire Chief Jerry Jensen, at left, listens as KOOTASCA’s Dana Herschbach describes the crisis in Koochiching and Itasca counties caused by a very cold winter, propane shortage and rising fuel costs.

courthouse on a cold winter day when he first took the commissioner position. Pavleck said the man was found dead inside a culvert just a few days later and he wished he’d tried to help more.

Herschbach said daily calls for emergency outages to KOOTASCA have exceeded staff processing capacity. Many requests for emergency assistance are handled on a first-come, first-served basis and may not receive funding for a few days. Because of the many calls, staff are working overtime hours and Saturdays to meet the additional demand. “We’re running out of resources ourselves,” he said.

Safety

Hirschbach said he, like many others in northern Minnesota, is heating his home with an electric space heater rather than pay up to \$5 per gallon for propane, along with service and delivery charges.

And he noted that the state’s “cold weather rule” doesn’t keep the heat on unless a customer has made a prior agreement with the vendor for payment and is making minimum payments. “Or, they can shut it off,” he said.

With many turning to wood and electricity for additional heat, Jensen urged people to have operating smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and to take a safety check of their homes by:

- checking to make sure their fire number or house number is visible from the street.

- making sure a smoke alarm that works is near a bedroom

- ensuring that a working carbon monoxide alarm is with 10-feet of a sleeping area.

And, he urged area residents to call him for more

information or to do a safety check of their residence. Contact Jensen at the Falls Fire Department at 283-2929.

Commissioner Wayne Skoe said many rural residents are turning to wood for heat, but some — new to the area or younger — may not be aware that burning “green” wood, or wood not completely dry, can build up soot and cause a chimney or other fire.

“I’m pretty worried about it,” he told Jensen.

Jensen and Hirschbach said more problems will be created should houses without heat be allowed to freeze up, causing waterlines to burst. Jensen said city crews have been responding to waterlines emergency below the city streets in recent days.

Former Commissioner Mike Hanson also attended Tuesday’s meeting, representing North Star Electric Cooperative. He said the co-op is having difficulty meeting the high demand.

He urged people having difficulty paying their bills to contact the North Star office. “We will work with you and do all we can to keep the costs down,” he said. “We’re worried about grandma and the low income folks.”

But Hirschbach and some county commissioners said the increased costs of heating during a winter that even elders remember as among the coldest is difficult for everyone, including moderate income earners, who may also be forced to make choices between paying other bills and heat bills.

“It’s a tough catastrophe,” Hanson said. “And this morning didn’t make it any easier.”

The low temperature Tuesday morning was 27-below zero, reported the National Weather Service.

MNSURE

► continued from A1

someone not meet the deadline.

People who do not have coverage and file federal income tax returns can be penalized and penalties will increase over time, he said. And, he added, there are other ways people may be penalized.

However, he said why wait to find out what the penalties will be. “The best way is to be proactive in life and just sign up,” he said.

Poenix said people with existing insurance provided through an employer do not have to take part, as long as that insurance meets a

standard. He urged people to find out if their insurance meets that standard.

Board Chairman Rob Ecklund told Poenix that his family had difficulty signing his son up for coverage. But a “site navigator” at the Rainy Lake Medical Center hospital campus provided assistance and completed the task in about 15 minutes.

Poenix agreed that agencies and organizations other than KOOTASCA may also be able to help.

With a number of jobs being eliminated locally, Pavleck urged unemployed people to sign up for coverage.

Poenix said MNSure’s website allows people “to

plug in their data and it says what they are eligible for,” he said. At that point, they may go to an insurance broker or purchase coverage through the exchange, he said. MNSure can provide federal tax credits to reduce the cost of health insurance.

And, he noted, MNSure or an insurance broker cannot now, under the federal Affordable Care Act, deny people coverage because of a preexisting condition.

MNSure also assists people in signing up for medical assistance and MinnesotaCare.

Poenix can be reached at 218-999-0835, toll-free at 877-687-1163, or email at jeffp@kootasca.org

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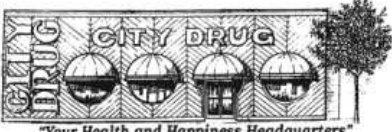
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