STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

**At left, Kathy Olson of International Falls, and her brother, Jim Weiss, wave to The Journal's camera as they travel south on Highway 71 early Monday. This is Olson's first Tram and she said she only participated in the first day of the effort. Weiss, however, has been involved in the initiative for about 15 years.**

## TRAM

➤ continued from A1

tiple brain and spinal cord lesions remind her of the disease she has lived with for 21 years.

"I'm very fortunate," she said of her battle with MS. "I'm lucky I can still be active and am able to get around. Keep moving — that is my motto."

Emison and her husband, Tom, are members of the team Pirates in Tight Pants, and they said they confidently spoke for not only their team, but everyone involved with the Tram on their primary mission.

"To end MS," Tom Emison said. "It is as simple as that. We are going to end this disease, we are very close."

"It should have been ended yesterday," Pam chimed in.

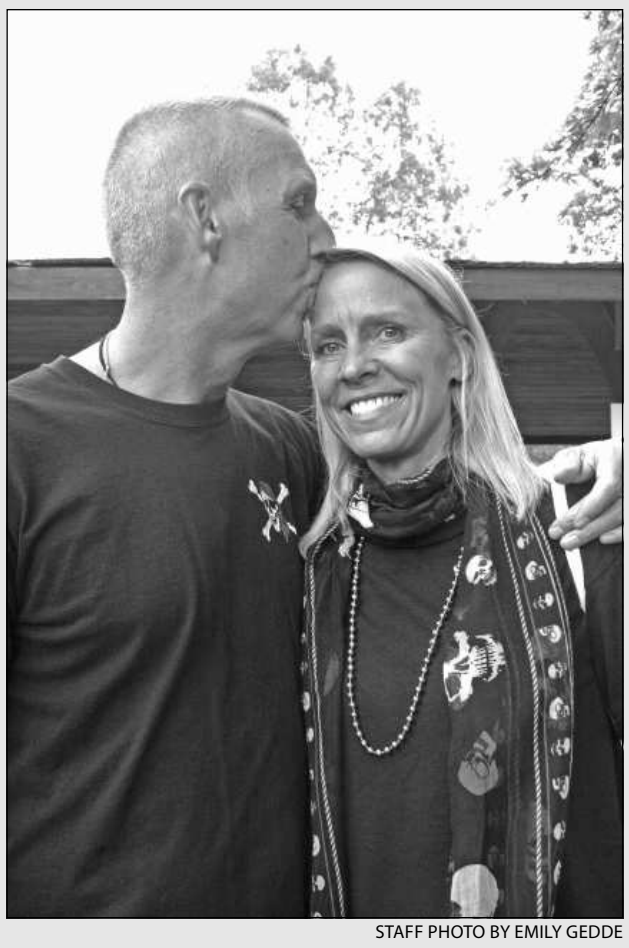
Tom smiled as recalled the memory of meeting his wife eight years ago. He said he was already actively involved with the Tram and raising money to put a kibosh on the disease.

"I wanted to spend time with my son," Tom said of the original motive to become involved in the Tram. "We wanted to find a good cause to raise money for. Little did I know, my future wife would have MS."

It was clear the love the Emisons had for one another as well as their mission behind an extensive ride.

"This is a family event," Tom said. "Look around, what a great thing to be apart of."

And while riders like Nelson didn't have immediate family members peddling alongside her this week, she said the entire group was her family.



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

**Tom Emison kisses his wife, Pam, who for 21 years has suffered from MS. The couple participate in the Tram with team Pirates in Tight Pants. Tom joked that the team is "legendary" and focuses on the mission of ending MS.**

"We're all so close," she said of the Tram cyclists and volunteers. "Even the people we're just meeting tonight."

Faye Whitbeck, president of the International Falls Chamber of Commerce, said she was told by Aaron Briner, Upper Midwest Tram manager, that this year's ride raised $800,000 towards defeating MS.

"The Tram experience is one anyone involved doesn't forget," Whitbeck said. "It's nothing less than amazing to witness the machinations of this endeavor...Riders are a distinct group in their sport but they come with all kinds of personalities. Most were the nicest and life-loving variety. We did all we could to welcome them and invite them back."

"I can't wait to come back," Nelson said. "This area is beautiful. International Falls did an exceptional job accommodating this event."

After leaving Borderland Monday, riders traveled 81.4 miles along Highway 65 to Orr the first day. The second day brought 61 miles, the third day 58 miles, the fourth day 68 miles, and last day 26 miles with the ride from Two Harbors to Duluth. The Tram concludes at the University of Minnesota – Duluth Friday.

## COUNCIL

➤ continued from A1

Arro of the North found the cost would be about $1,000.

Other councilors said they believed the information about wetlands would be valuable to the visioning process. But Anderson said wetland acreage in property on both sides of the Donahue property is similar and could provide an idea of the wetlands, which he said he believes is a significant part of the property.

City Attorney Steve Shermoen agreed, saying it may be possible to obtain the wetland information about the adjacent properties from the land owners.

In related business, Anderson told the council that he learned that Matt Donahue had offered, via a news story, to buy the property back from the city at the $60,000 the city has already paid to his firm in brokerage fees.

"I think we ought to consider the offer and taking him up on it," Anderson told the council.

The property was in 2009 provided to the city in exchange for brokerage fees of $90,000, which were based on a $1.8 million appraisal of the property. The agreement also calls for the city to establish a walking trail and monument to the Donahue family. Prior to providing it to the city, the property was valued for taxable purposes by Koochiching County at about $400,000.

But other councilors believed it best to allow the public discussion of the property to take place before considering what to do with the property.

Councilor Gail Rognerud said she's heard from a number of people about different ideas for the property. "People would like to give input and this is their opportunity," she said of the July 31 meeting.

Councilor Cynthia Jaksa said even at the lowest value, selling parcels of the property at the assessed value would benefit the community.

But Anderson noted that lots of the property were for sale for a lengthy period. Just two lots were sold, he said.

Meanwhile, he said he would hold in abeyance his recommendation to sell the property back to Donahue until after the July 31 meeting.

## OBERSTAR

➤ continued from A1

cost is minor compared to the amount of information Oberstar may be able to relay. The commission is made up of Falls city councilors.

"He does have a vision of the multimodal district and the FTZ," said Commissioner Cynthia Jaksa, who referred to Oberstar as Mr. U.S. Transportation. "He wants to help us. He's fond of International Falls."

EDA President Gail Rognerud said Oberstar's visit would give the EDA a better feel for whether the commission would want to use his expertise as a consultant.

But Commissioner Bob Anderson wondered how Oberstar could obtain the client data from CN when that information was previously unavailable. And he wondered whether the same information could be discussed through a conference call with Oberstar instead of a visit.

Mason said that Oberstar would attempt to secure the information. In addition, she said he would be able to share information about warehouse trends and opportunities for growth in the community related to transportation.

Steve Shermoen, a member of the EDA Advisory Committee, urged the commission to move forward with Oberstar's visit, saying that the former congressman's time is valuable and he would not spend time in International Falls if he didn't feel it would lead to something. Oberstar's visit was supported by the committee.

"I think he would not have the desire to come here unless he could help us," Shermoen said. "This is a great opportunity."

In related business, Rognerud announced that a $657,000 state grant obtained last year for use in providing infrastructure to the district is no longer in jeopardy of being revoked.

**Jim Oberstar**

Rognerud said she expects work to run utilities to the district would begin this fall with the bulk of the work done in the spring.

Meanwhile, the grant was also discussed at the International Falls City Council meeting, which followed Monday's commission meeting. The agenda included support of a resolution asking state officials to allow the city to retain the grant despite changes in plans at the district, which Anderson said is not now needed.

Anderson said he spoke to state officials who said that the Boise Inc. plan to lay off 265 workers at the local paper mill was the primary reason the grant was not revoked. In addition, he said there's still a chance to secure the kind of development in the district that was identified by the city in the grant application.

However, he said he's not certain the city can use the money for infrastructure improvements without securing a developer.

Rognerud and other councilors said the infrastructure is needed to attract a developer. She suggested the city's Infrastructure Committee meet to discuss the plan.

Anderson said the grant was provided to the city because it indicated it had a client. "It turns out we did not have someone and that became evident to the state and it came under review," said.

He also said $300,000 of local taxpayer money is needed in addition to the grant to do the infrastructure work.

Mason, who was not present at the council meeting, said Tuesday in an email that she "reached out to our developer and met with him this morning. I wanted to ensure he is working on this project for the multimodal district."

The developer has not yet been named publicly.

During the meeting, Anderson said the grant application indicated a company, Nexus, would be involved in the district project. He said staff from Nexus have not returned his calls.

Mason has said Nexus stepped away from the project once a local developer stepped forward.

Mason said in the email that the potential developer has advised her that he is "'still on the same course". Nothing has changed in his desired plan to locate in the multimodal district.

"He is working diligently with various people on the components of his business at this moment. He is anticipating being able to formally and publicly request land in the zone this fall, and he desires to be able to grub/clear shortly thereafter. Should all move forward in how he envisions, he will begin construction in the summer, with an estimated construction time of 6 to 8 months."

Mason also emailed that the developer wrote a letter to state officials outlining his project and that the letter was considered in their decision to allow the city to retain the grant.

The council approved rewording the resolution supporting city retention of the grant and using it instead as a thank you letter to the officials involved.

keep in touch online ...
www.ifallsjournal.com