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Volunteers gather at City Beach Thursday to help fill sandbags to distribute to residents in need of help as water levels continue to rise.

STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

County prepares for even HIGHER water levels

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The last time it rained this much, there was an ark and two of every animal involved, and the whole ordeal ended with a rainbow.

This week, docks floated away, shorelines eroded, ditches filled with water, and live trees fell as their roots were loosened by the saturated soil.

After the late start of spring in Borderland, the area has been hit with a deluge of rain that started at the end of May, and continued through the first half of June.

From May 30-Wednesday, International Falls received 4.27 inches of rain, with 2.71 inches coming in the first 11 days of June, according to the National Weather Service in Duluth. Normal precipitation for the first 11 days is 1.27 inches, so this year is 1.44 inches above normal.

NWS-Duluth meteorologist Kevin Kraujalis said the culprit of this rain is an active jet stream over the northern U.S., which has brought storm systems along with it, resulting in the frequent rainfall. However, he said their six-, 10-, and 14-day outlooks showed normal precipitation for the period, so rain was expected — just not this much.

Koochiching County Sheriff Brian Jespersen said he gave out probably 2,000 sandbags between Wednesday and Thursday to people who need them to fight rising water levels. During an emergency response meeting with the

Koochiching County Board Thursday morning, Jespersen said he had about 35,000 sandbags on hand, but he wanted to order more in case he ran out.

The board approved the purchase of 50,000 more sandbags at a cost of \$7,500, which Jespersen said he could get delivered overnight from Grand Forks, and have Friday. With the NWS predicting more rain starting late Friday night through today and tomorrow, Jespersen said he didn't want to take the chance of running out.

"I didn't want to go overboard, but I want to be prepared, too," Jespersen said.

County Board Chairman Rob Ecklund said he spoke with county Administration Director Teresa Briggs earlier Thursday morning, when she said to go ahead and approve the purchase, and they would figure out how it fits into the budget next week.

Jespersen also asked for volunteers to help prepare and load sandbags for anyone who needs them, he said. More than 30 volunteers met Thursday at City Beach, where they loaded sandbags for residents to pick up. A surplus of volunteers then headed to Bohman landing, Tilson landing, and Dove Island landing, to load more sandbags there.

When it comes to loading sandbags, Jespersen said they should be filled halfway, not full, and the attached drawstring should be tightened near the top. As a rule of thumb for building a dike, he said, for every foot built up, the wall should build twice as



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

Ditches filled with water Thursday along Highway 11 east and elsewhere in Koochiching County.



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

The ladder onto a dock at Ranier Beach is barely visible above the surface of the water.

far out. For a 1-foot high dike, build two feet out, for a 2-foot high dike, build four feet out,

Water to A7 ►

Honoring Mr. Pete's passion

Foundation aims to honor longtime Falls teacher and hockey coach

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

When disease affects a family, it can be devastating.

While many ailments have treatment plans — some which can be a long road to recovery — others leave patients and their families with a lack of answers and few choices.

The Peterson family found themselves with the latter option.

For the last four years, Mike Peterson, a longtime Falls Elementary teacher and hockey coach, has battled Lewy Body Dementia. The once energetic educator known for his popular Light Game, found himself having hallucinations and unaware what was taking over his mind and body.

"It's a horrifying disease," Peterson's daughter, Gina Skopinski told The Journal. "For a long time my family and I were in denial. This couldn't be happening to our dad."

But, disease doesn't discriminate. If it did, someone who found such joy in shaping young minds would not likely be a memory-loss target.

"We found ourselves grieving for someone who is still alive," Skopinski said of herself; her mother, Renee; and two sisters, Annie and Jennifer.

While it may not be a term heard often, Lewy Body Dementia, or LBD, is not a rare disease. In fact, according to the LBD Association website, it affects about 1.3 million people in the United States. Because its symptoms mimic more commonly known diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, LBD is widely under-diagnosed.

Luckily, if there is a positive side to Peterson's diagnosis, doctors were able to pinpoint the demons taking over the active community man.

"My mom had taken him to several neurologists in Duluth and they thought it was medication he was taking," Skopinski said. "Finally, she took him to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. The doctor who diagnosed him is one of the few doctors in the nation who specializes in extensive Lewy Body research."

With such a horrible thing happening to her father, Skopinski admits it would be easy to succumb to grief — especially when the disease takes on different stages. But she decided to steer her energy to something more positive. With the help of friend and Falls native Kim Sundin Oppelt, the family this month launched an effort in Peterson's name.



Mike Peterson

Mr. Pete to A7 ►

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