

LOCALNEWS

Discussing global issues at a local level

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Discussing foreign policy issues at the local level is the focus of a group that welcomes conversation from all ages.

Great Decisions is America's largest discussion program on world affairs, said Sue Nordquist, who helped get the local effort on its feet.

"The future belongs to those who see global issues as challenges worthy of our best thought processes and greatest efforts," she said about the program in Minnesota International Center newsletter. "I welcome the

challenge of examining global issues with members of my community including my students, colleagues, neighbors and friends. I believe in education that provides knowledge of other languages and cultures, builds international awareness on foreign policy and contributes to a more just and peaceful world."

Meetings, facilitated by community members, are conducted from 4 to 5:30 p.m.



Sue Nordquist

once a month at the International Falls Public Library meeting room in the lower level. Meetings offer a variety of topics from Egypt to Myanmar. According to the Foreign Policy Association, which sponsors the program, Great Decisions provides background information and policy options for the eight most critical issues facing America each year and serves as the focal text for discussion groups across the country.

The effort started locally in 2006 after Nordquist attended the Minnesota International Center Great Decisions Conference in New York. The conference

inspired the former Falls High Spanish teacher to spearhead a local effort at Falls High School or Rainy River Community College, she said.

"I received thousands of dollars worth of materials (from MIC) to get things started," Nordquist said.

However, neither local learning institutions were interested in offering a class. That didn't stop Nordquist. She turned her focus to creating a community group.

"At any given meeting, we have anywhere from five to 55 people attend," she said of the meetings still held today.

Nordquist said for those who attend the meetings, there is material to read and discussion questions to prompt conversation. She added attendees are welcome to come and listen, too.

"This is an educational group, not an action group," she said. "It's to learn and to converse and become better global citizens in our local community and our entire world."

For more information, contact Nordquist at 283-8687 or Diane Adams at the library if a group of students or individuals are planning to attend the discussion. Materials will be provided to all guests.

Dates, topics and hosts for 2014 Great Decisions gatherings are:

- Jan. 7 — "Egypt," hosted by Byrne and Carole Johnson
- Feb. 11 — "Threat Assessment," hosted by Leanne and Bob Crompton
- March 11 — "Myanmar," hosted by Bob Phillips
- April 8 — "Nato," hosted by Donna Erickson and Vicky Hepperlen

Littlefork passes 2014 tax levy

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

At its December council meeting, the Littlefork City Council adopted its 2014 tax levy, which did not increase from 2013.

During the Dec. 19 council meeting, the council adopted the final tax levy of \$114,645, which is composed of two parts, Littlefork Mayor Mike Fort said. The tax portion is \$106,000, and the debt service is \$8,645. The debt service is a payment made on debt from previous years, Fort said.

In other business, the council was updated on the status of two vacant downtown buildings. The buildings are on both sides of J C's Restaurant on Main Street in Littlefork, and city Administrator Sonja Pelland is working with the owners

to find out their plans for the buildings, Fort said.

Gail Haugland owns the building at 318 Main St., and Becky Belanger owns the building at 310 Main St., Pelland said. Belanger's building housed a sewing shop, she said, and Haugland's building was a motel, which is no longer "rentable." Pelland has been working with them to determine what Haugland and Belanger will do with their buildings.

"We're at a stand still right now," she said. "Gail doesn't know what she plans to do, and Becky said they'll repair it or tear it down."

The city doesn't have an ordinance for vacant buildings, Pelland said, but she's trying to find an ordinance that might provide some help or encouragement on how to proceed. The appearance of the city's downtown

face is important, she said, and finding businesses to occupy those spaces is good for the city.

"We don't want to just tear it down, it would be nice to have something built up in its place," she said. "If the buildings there aren't good enough to use, we need to tear them down and see if there's something else. Maybe someone else wants to start something up, we've got to find those people."

The council also approved an extension of one month to complete the budget for the Littlefork Medical Center, Fort said. The budget has to go through the LMC board and then the city council, and the way the meetings line up, they needed an extra month to complete it, he said.

"This is pretty normal, it's been done like this a few years in a row," Fort said.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sen. Tom Bakk played host to an annual fundraiser that benefits Arrowhead Region food shelves, including the Falls Hunger Coalition and The Salvation Army International Falls.

Bakk hosts annual food shelf fundraiser

Governor also attends to benefit Hunger Solutions Minnesota

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Falls Hunger Coalition and The Salvation Army of International Falls will benefit from a fundraiser held Dec. 19 that raised more than \$120,000 benefit Arrowhead Region food shelves.

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, played host to the seventh annual "Stock the Shelves" fundraiser. The event was held at a downtown St. Paul pub and drew Gov. Mark Dayton.

"I'm proud to help raise money for the Arrowhead Region food shelves," said Bakk in a statement. "Even with a recovering economy, job losses and rising food costs

mean more families are stretched to the limit. We are doing our part to help, and I hope all Minnesotans will take time to help others this holiday season."

In Borderland, the Falls Hunger Coalition and The Salvation Army International Falls will benefit from the fundraiser.

The annual events have helped to raise more than \$500,000 for food shelves since 2007, said Lydia Bjorge, the organizer of the event and an employee at Lockridge Grindal Nauen, a yearly sponsor of the event.

"For many people, holiday meals are celebratory experiences that foster deeper connections between family and friends. But for thousands of Minnesota families, it's a source of anxiety and fear because they don't know if they can afford their next meal," said Colleen Moriarty, executive direc-

tor of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. "We appreciate this terrific support for low-income families from Senator Bakk and our sponsors."

While Minnesota's economic climate continues to improve, one in five families with children still struggle with hunger because of poverty, food access difficulties, and a lack of education about nutrition assistance benefits, notes Moriarty. Simultaneously, community food shelves are stretched to the limit.

Minnesota food shelves are on record pace to exceed 3 million visits for the third consecutive year, according to Moriarty. In addition, food shelves are seeing an increase in visits from people whose SNAP benefits were cut Nov. 1. Some food shelves have implemented waiting lists to handle the increase, sometimes with a week or more wait for an appointment.

Unemployment rate falls in November in Minnesota

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Minnesota's unemployment rate fell again in November, and remains below the U.S. unemployment rate of seven percent for that month.

The unemployment rate in Minnesota fell 0.2 percent in November to a seasonally adjusted 4.6 percent, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

In Koochiching County, the labor force in November was 6,521 workers, with 608 unemployed, for an unemployment rate of 9.3 percent. Compared to November 2012, where the labor force was 6,496 workers with 583 unemployed, for an unem-

ployment rate of nine percent.

Private sector employment in Minnesota grew by 2,400 jobs in November, according to DEED. The state has also gained 39,800 jobs over the past year for a growth rate of 1.4 percent, compared to the U.S. growth rate of 1.7 percent.

"The labor market continues to show steady improvement, with the number of unemployed Minnesotans now below pre-recessionary levels," DEED Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben said in a release. "The state



Katie Clark Sieben

economy is growing and outperforming the rest of the country in many key categories."

Information led all sectors in growth in November, gaining 1,300 jobs, while manufacturing and construction each added 400 jobs. Government lost 3,200 jobs, along with professional and business services, which lost 1,600 jobs.

Over the past year, nine of Minnesota's eleven industrial sectors gained jobs, led by education and health services, which added 11,100 jobs. Trade, transportation and utilities gained 10,400 jobs, construction gained 4,200 jobs, and logging and mining gained 500 jobs. Manufacturing lost 800 jobs in the past year.

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