

Learning experience

Youngster flies a traction kite

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Matching donations

Funds will support backpack program

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STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

From the left, Milton, Brent and Ross Benike pose in front of a crop of sweet corn growing on their farm in Birchdale. The corn, they said, will be available for the public to come purchase and pick in August.

Northwestern Minnesota’s best kept secret

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

When the Benike family moved their farm from an agricultural hot spot in southern Minnesota to Birchdale, they said those who knew them were convinced they had “gone off the deep end.”

“The people down south thought farm land in this area would be full of sticks and rocks,” said Brent Benike. “During the first year we lived here, we had 75 visitors. I think they stopped by to make sure we hadn’t gone crazy.”

In 1977, Milton and Carol Benike, along with their three sons, Brent, Ross and Kent, relocated from Elgin, Minn., near Rochester to a secluded 800-acre piece of property nestled off Highway 11 not far from Rainy River.

Thirty-six years later, the family has proven that they are anything but crazy.

“Some of those same people who thought we had lost it in the beginning, now see how beautiful this area is and use it as their home away from home,” Ross said.

It may have had its ups and downs, but the farm continues



The 700-acre Benike farm is located in Birchdale, a city of less than 200 people, located right off Highway 11.

to be successful and was this week awarded the 2013 Koochiching County Family Farm Award by the Koochiching County Extension program.

“The recognition is a nice honor,” Brent said. “We know so many great people in this area and we feel like we should be accepting (the award) for the entire area.”

Brent, along with Ross and

Milton, Tuesday sat down with The Journal to discuss the history behind the farm that stood out to those who selected the family for the award. Kent was at work and Carol lives in an assisted living facility in International Falls. And perhaps it was symbolic that while the three recalled the memories of their farm, 85-year-old Milton sat back and let his sons do

the storytelling – similar to how the three brothers have taken over many of the duties on the farm.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

Ross said when his parents decided to settle in Birchdale, the decision didn’t come from the couple pointing to a

Farm to A7 ►

Eligible mill workers eligible for TAA

Leaders praise U.S. Department of Labor’s decision

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Eligible Boise Inc. workers who will lose their jobs at the paper mill in International Falls may apply for federal assistance for reemployment and job assistance with designation by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance.

The TAA benefits were a topic discussed by state, federal and local leaders at several recent meetings held to discuss how the community will be impacted by the termination of 265 jobs by October at the local mill and how to assist the workers displaced, as well as others in the community who will be affected, in the economic recovery.

The mill has said the need to terminate the jobs is based on global competition, among other issues, and will help to stabilize the remaining 580 jobs at the mill.

Local and federal leaders praised the department’s decision announced Tuesday.

Lori Lyman, Boise Inc. public affairs manager, said the company is pleased that workers affected by the lay offs are eligible for what she called the valuable Trade Adjustment Assistance and thanked Congressman Rick Nolan and Sens. Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar for their assistance with a petition to make the displaced mill workers eligible.

Lyman said the company will provide a list of employees to the Minnesota Workforce Center and staff there will notify and invite the employees to a meeting to explain the benefits and services available under the TAA program.

Lyman said the meeting will include information about deadlines that apply to applications for these benefits. For more information, workers can contact the

Boise to A7 ►

Local cyclists prepare for MS TRAM ride

280-mile vent begins in International Falls

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Several local cyclists will participate in the 280-mile Multiple Sclerosis Society The Ride Across Minnesota, which begins in International Falls Monday.

Know by the acronym TRAM, about 800 cyclists and 200 support volunteers will make camp Sunday afternoon in Smokey Bear Park and the community taking part in

local tours and activities.

The group will depart Borderland Monday for Orr, its next destination on the five-leg tour that raises funds to create a world without multiple sclerosis. The final destination is Duluth.

Featured in the race from Borderland are a father-daughter combo, along with other family members as part of the Flying Squirrels team, and mother-son combo from Littlefork.

Heidi Vork and son Tyler, 19, of Littlefork, will be among the many participants as will Sara Kennedy and George Schleiff of Flying Squirrels team.

TEAM VORK

This will Tyler’s first MS Tram and Heidi’s third. Tyler Vork said he and his mom have been training for the event, riding about 30 miles each day.

“I’m feeling good, excited for it,” he said Thursday. “I’m not as nervous as my mom is. I just want to finish it, without having to take

a car to get to the end of the day.”

The pair will camp for a couple of the nights and spend the other nights at the home of family friends.

Heidi said her first MS Tram was in 2004 when she was convinced by freinds Sonia Pelland and Lori Dobbs to take part. She did it again in 2007 with the women, who were joined that year by Pelland’s daughter Melissa.

Heidi Vork said she had a cousin in her 20s who died from complications of MS, leaving behind three small children. And, she said on

previous rides she’s met other people with the disease that were riding.

“It was amazing—their attitude and their will and their drive,” she said. “MS can be a debilitating disease, it takes away movement. I can move so I just want to keep moving and help other people to keep moving.”

And, she said participating with Tyler is an added benefit. “Out of all my kids, Tyler is the one that will get the most out of it. He’s go-

TRAM to A7 ►