

LOCALNEWS

New grading system possible at FHS

Math teacher proposes elimination of valedictorian, salutatorian

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

As soon as second semester of this academic year, students at Falls High School taking more difficult classes could earn more for their grades.

Falls High math teacher Timm Ringhofer Monday provided information to the Falls School Board on adopting a weighted grading system for juniors and seniors at FHS.

A committee established to evaluate the issue proposed the grading system be implemented second semester of this school year.

A weighted grading system offers an equal credit for a lower grade in a more difficult class.

“We would add 0.5 to grades A-C,” Ringhofer explained. “A lot of schools (we researched) are using that amount.”

The math teacher said the grades of students who attend Rainy River Community College through the post secondary enrollment option program would not be weighted.

Ringhofer explained the idea was student generated. “It really came from the student council,” he said.

Taylor Hebner, FHS student, has done significant research on the issue by calling other schools to find out how they use the system and what works and what doesn’t, he said.

In addition, Ringhofer said the committee also proposed to eliminate having a senior class valedictorian and salutatorian.

“It seems to be coming the thing to do,” he said of the idea. “Rather, we should have some other level where all the honor students are recognized all the same way at the same time.”

Action, if any, is expected to be taken by the board during a future meeting.

In other business Monday, Josie Toninato, president of Local 510 which represents the district’s custodial staff, requested the board reconsider reducing the secretarial hours at

Falls Elementary.

According to Superintendent Nurdy Nelson, secretarial employees hired before July 2010 work eight hours per day from Aug. 1 to June 30. However, those hired after July 2010, work Aug. 15 to June 15 for a full eight hours each day, he said.

Toninato, who is custodian, said the latter isn’t enough.

“The Falls Elementary secretary is the only secretarial support for that school,” she said. “The position is extremely busy.”

She said during the summer months, the public continues to come into the building looking for staff.

“The month of June is spent tying up loose ends from the school year among other duties,” she said. “The month of August is extremely busy... getting ready for the upcoming school year.”

Toninato said having good customer service will help recruit and retain students to the district.

“It is not a wise idea to reduce the secretarial positions at this time,” she concluded.

Backus to offer concert series

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

For the first time, Backus Community Center will offer its own concert series with the first show scheduled for Friday.

Chris Koza, a singer/songwriter, and his band Rogue Valley, will hit the stage of the community center’s auditorium at 7 p.m. as the first performance in the five-show series.

“This is something our board of directors has talked about for years,” said Ward Merrill, executive director of Backus, of establishing the concert series.

While Merrill said Backus has offered a number of its own productions in the past, this series will “be completely different.”

Featuring four shows and one play, Merrill expressed excitement over offering the opportunity to the community.

“A series like this fits with more of our vision as a professional venue,” he said. “Both for the performers and the community.”

The lineup includes: The Rose Ensemble, a vocal and instrumental bluegrass group; Hard Travelin’ with Woody, a one-man show featuring Randy Noojin performing a tribute to Woody Guthrie; “The Mill,” a play written by Falls native Jeannine Coulombe about a 1989 labor riot in International Falls; and The Galactic Cowboy Orchestra, original and traditional bluegrass.

Merrill spoke highly of

Performance schedule

All concerts begin at 7 p.m. at Backus Community Center.

Sept. 28 - Chris Koza

Oct. 14 - The Rose Ensemble

Nov. 8 - Hard Travelin’ with Woody

Feb. 28 and March 1 - “The Mill”

March 22 - The Galactic Cowboy Orchestra

all the performances and said he was excited for the community to experience “The Mill,” since this is the area that inspired the production.

“I think people are going to enjoy the play, as I’m sure they will all the shows,” Merrill said. “Prior to making the play part of the series, I’ve talk to former and current Boise employees and they all seem to agree this is a unique opportunity for people in the Falls to look back on our own history, especially during the time of another economic crisis taking place.”

The series, Merrill said, is available through a Minnesota State Arts Board grant as well as funding from the local Marshall N. Knudson Family Community Fund.

Backus was one of 34 recipients of the state arts board grant, which Merrill said had 90 applicants and is “pretty fierce competition.” The bulk of the about \$50,000 grant will be put toward the play, he said.

“In a sense, they have to produce the play all over again,” he said. “It’s a speedy process.”

In addition to perfor-

mances at Backus, many of the performers will reach out into the county’s schools to conduct workshop-type exercises with students.

“We’re so remote and all of us don’t get the opportunity to get exposure to high-quality artistic experiences,” Merill said. “(Outreach) is an important piece of providing an arts piece to this area.”

Merrill said that although he is retired, he taught for 34 years and knows when schools have to make cuts, fine arts are typically the first to go. Offering outreach, he said, is a way Backus can support the arts in schools.

“We view it as part of our responsibility,” he said. “This way, kids have the chance to see people who have developed a career out of fine arts.”

Admission to each show is \$12 for adults, \$6 for students and \$25 for families. Season passes are also available at the cost of \$45 for adults, \$10 for students and \$95 for family passes. Tickets are available at the Backus office, City Drug and Betty’s in Fort Frances.

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