

Run returns
Reindeer Run set for Dec. 24

A4



Holiday performance
St. Thomas students host annual play

A10



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\$1

RECAP project near halfway point

John Howard, chief technical officer for Coronal LLC, explains the basic science behind the Renewable Energy Clean Air Project.

STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT



BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

An energy conversion project which has been in the works for more than six years in Koochiching County was discussed at a dinner presentation Thursday. The Renewable Energy Clean Air Project would take solid fuel and convert it via plasma gasification to a usable form of energy like electricity or biofuel. John Howard and Stephen Korstad of Coronal LLC, a plasma gasification and consulting company that has partnered with the Koochiching Development Authority on the project,

discussed the project's details, technology, and job impact on the community. Howard outlined the work Coronal has done so far on the project regarding preliminary design and community outreach. The project is at about the 30 percent completion point, he said, and based on present funding, a final decision point is scheduled for spring 2015. At that time, the KDA Board, along with the city of International Falls, will make the final decision to move forward with the project and begin construction. "We still have a lot to do, no ifs, ands, or buts about it," Howard

said. "But we've come a long way. The knowledge gained from the work efforts we've done thus far has gotten our project attention at the national level." Coronal is still working out a detailed cost estimate for the project, Howard said, which will outline the cost of each item in the project. But they project the construction to cost \$50 million, of which about half has already been raised, he said. They've received \$5 million in state and federal grants, which has helped fund studies and preliminary work that has been done so far.

RECAP to A7 ►

Board tables plan for consult

Superintendent asks board to look for cheaper options

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

With saving money topping the International Falls School Board's list of priorities, action to hire a consultant to develop long-term goals for the district was tabled Monday.

"The board had discussed consulting services at an earlier date...in the ballpark of \$4,000, maybe \$5,000," said Superintendent Nurdy Nelson of hiring a consultant.

Based on a recommendation from a member of the Blue Ribbon Panel, a group of community members who meet to brainstorm ideas to better the Falls school district, officials sought a quote from Big River Group LLC, based in St. Cloud.

The proposed price tag for Big River's services came back at \$12,025 with an additional \$24,500 for superintendent search services.

"It's a cost that is quite in excess of what we were talking about," Nelson told board members.

Nelson last week told The Journal that as superintendent, he has started the process of long-term planning for the district, setting goals, and meeting with the public. With no intention to renew his contract that expires June 30, Nelson said if his replacement doesn't continue a similar process, the effort could stop.

"And that is what a consultant would do," he said last week of continuing the process.

But Monday, the superintendent recommended board members table any action on hiring a consultant and seek quotes from other companies.

"At this time, I would have to recommend the board do some research on other consultants," he said.

Board to A7 ►



STAFF PHOTOS BY SPENSER BICKETT

Falls Fire Chief Jerry Jensen helps unload an ambulance full of toys at the Salvation Army Monday. The toys were collected as part of a toy drive inspired by a similar event the Virginia Fire Department puts on.

This sleigh has sirens

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

As a child, not getting presents during the holidays can be heartbreaking. One local toy drive made sure some children won't be empty-handed these holidays.

A unique toy drive allowed residents to fill an ambulance with gifts on Black Friday and this past Saturday. The drive was a joint effort by the International Falls Fire and Ambulance Service and Police Department, and came together after paramedic Nathan Myers saw the Virginia Fire Department do it last year.

The groups parked an ambulance at County Market on Black Friday, and at Super One this past Saturday, and collected toys, food, and cash donations for the Salvation Army. Overall, the effort collected 229 toys, \$731 in cash, and 715 pounds of food, Bev Mayfield, Salvation Army envoy, said.



Paramedic Zach Scofield hands toys to Falls Fire Chief Jerry Jensen Monday.



Lisa Hanover unloads food for the Salvation Army Monday. The toy drive also took in nonperishable food items.

Toys to A7 ►

CN to get ticket for blocked crossing

Following recent incident, attorney says all other options have been exhausted

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Canadian National Railway officials are likely to receive a citation by the Koochiching County Sheriff's Office for blocking a rail crossing for more than one hour last week.

Sheriff Brian Jespersen, Undersheriff Bruce Grothberg and county Attorney Jeff Naglosky got support to issue the citation from the Koochiching County Board Tuesday when they met to discuss the Dec. 10 incident. They said a CN Railway train blocked the crossing at County Road 24, also known the Van Lynn Road, for one hour and 38 minutes.

It's not even the latest example of lengthy train delays at the crossing, they said. Grothberg said the same crossing, which cuts off the only access to the east part of the county road, was blocked for 50 minutes by a stalled train Monday.

The three officers of the court told commissioners blocked crossings have been a concern for years and it's time to take action.

Naglosky said the law is clear: Rail operators may block crossings for 10 minutes. He said his office has files containing legal opinions about blocked crossings dating back to 2007.

"When they sit there for over one hour, it's a problem," Naglosky said. "I feel we have exhausted all other options."

The citation, a first offense, will be considered a petty misdemeanor, he said.

CN spokesman Patrick Waldron said Tuesday he's not familiar with the citation.

"If they issue something we'll take a look at it and review it accordingly," he told The Journal in a phone call just after Tuesday's board meeting

County to A7 ►