

VISITING THE PYRAMIDS



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

A basic seven skater dresses in her Arabian nights garb to “visit Egyptian pyramids” in the Game of Life.

STARTING NEW



Senior skaters Aurora Hutton, left, and Elise Larson, start a new career on their journey through the Game of Life.

DNR

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that federal transportation dollars are distributed through is called MAP-21.” MAP-21 establishes a consolidated program that provides funding for a variety of alternative transportation projects, including many that were previously eligible activities under separately funded programs. A big change in the program, Hubley said, is that scenic byways and safe routes to school programs are now included with all other transportation projects around the region and will compete for money out of the same funding pot.

“Unfortunately, the dollars they have to compete for are less under this new formula, so we have more projects competing for less dollars,” he said. Leu said the good news is MnDOT will have more money to spend on the national highway system, but less to spend on other roads – like the local Highway 217. “The pavement quality is deteriorating, and we’re going to use trunk highway funds to resurface that,” he said of the highway between Ray and Littlefork. Other upcoming projects for Koochiching County, Leu said, include a number of paving projects as well as work on U.S. Highway 53 to include bypass and turning lanes, some or all of which could be located in St. Louis County.

“It’s probably going to be a \$25 million to \$28 million dollar project,” he said. The county board also Tuesday: ■ Entered into a one-year tire recycling agreement with Earl Boyum, with the option to extend the agreement up to an additional two years if both parties agree. ■ Authorized the county’s environmental service director to increase tire coupon prices to better match costs to the county. New prices for a passenger car/light truck will increase from \$2 to \$3. Coupons for large trucks will increase from \$7 to \$9. ■ Adjusted the current uncompacted waste tipping fee for haulers from \$7.33 to \$11 per cubic yard. ■ Adopted a revised billing policy for the county’s environmental services department. ■ Agreed to seek bids to replace machinery for the transfer station that was not part of the 2014 budget.

DILL

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■ 80,000 new homeowners paying down mortgage interest will see an average tax cut of \$60. ■ 60,000 teachers will see a tax deduction for their classroom expense costs. ■ 26,000 Minnesotans paying for childcare with incomes below \$38,000 will see an \$80 tax cut (this tax cut year begins next year). ■ 30,000 college students and families paying college expenses will see an average \$125 tax cut. ■ \$400,000 in tax relief is provided for families who receive employer-provided adoption assistance. ■ And homeowners who refinanced or had a short sale will see \$7.2 million in tax cuts.

In addition, the law repealed three business-to-business taxes enacted last year: ■ The sales tax on storage and warehousing services, scheduled to go into effect on April 1. ■ The sales tax on repair labor for commercial and industrial equipment (including farm equipment) and electronic and precision equipment. ■ The sales tax on telecommunications equipment. Bill Blazar, Minnesota Chamber senior vice president of public affairs and business development, said in a statement that all Minnesotans benefit from the tax bill and he is pleased that lawmakers listened to businesses. “Businesses spoke loud and clear as to the negative impact of these taxes on their ability to grow

Minnesota’s economy,” he said in a statement. “We’re pleased that the legislators and governor listened, but remind them that these taxes should never have been enacted in the first place. We’re disappointed, however, that the enactment of the up-front exemption for sales tax on capital equipment was delayed. There is more than enough money in the state’s projected surplus to both pay for tax relief and increase the state’s budget reserve.” Dill said the new law also contains \$33 million in tax credits and finances for two more years the Angel Investment Credit for start-up businesses and entrepreneurs. And it repeals the gift tax and increases the estate tax exemption from \$1 million to \$2 million over five

years and simplifies it by making it a stand-alone tax. And the new law saves for the next rainy day by depositing \$150 million in the state’s budget reserve. **Taxes** The Minnesota Department of Revenue is advising taxpayers who may be affected by these changes for tax year 2013 to wait until April 3 to file their taxes, noted Dill. “If you have already filed, DOR will do everything it can to avoid having taxpayers file amended returns,” he said. “DOR says if they can’t fix the returns at their end, then they will notify taxpayers that they need to submit an amended return.” Find out more at the DOR website at <http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Documents/press-conference-032414/Overview.pdf>

EDA

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utilities to the multimodal district site using a state grant and the city’s matching funds. “Is it the intention of the advisory board that we install utilities no matter what?” he asked, “or wait until someone purchases property?” Ward said the board knew the council had passed a motion to start the process, so did not consider the question Anderson posed. EDA President Gail Rognrud said city Public Works

Director Gary Skallman has scheduled bid opening this spring with installation of the utilities to the property expected to be complete this fall. She, and Councilors Cynthia Jaksa and Paul Eklund said the installation tied into another item on the agenda, which called for an update on the state’s “shovel ready” certification. They said having utilities brought to the property would assist in marketing it to a developer. EDA Director Shawn Mason also said state officials believe the grant should be used to bring utilities to the site. But Anderson said being

shovel ready is open to interpretation, and does not necessarily mean having utilities to the site. He said people have inquired about siting projects in the foreign trade zone, jointly owned by the city and Koochiching County, to which utilities have not been installed. Included in the plan is the criteria used to develop and prioritize goals and action items: Community impact — if the goal is achieved, will the impact be substantial in the community? Chance of success — is the goal reasonably attained? Resource availability —

does the IFEDA/city of International Falls possess adequate resources to achieve the goal? IFEDA ownership — But for the IFEDA, will any other entity, commission or department achieve this goal? It includes as “operating norms: The IFEDA will partner with, and/or support affiliated development organizations, and perform outreach and advocacy.” Meanwhile, in other action the EDA approved inclusion of Jenell Feller and Ward Merrill on the advisory board for four-year terms. A motion to amend the EDA bylaws to include the

establishment of the advisory board was approved on a 3-1 motion, with Anderson voting no. The value of the advisory board was not the point, he said. “I find it very valuable, too,” he said. Anderson said his research of several other EDAs in Minnesota revealed they do not use advisory boards. And, he asked why include the board in the bylaws when it has operated for about one year without being in the bylaws. He said one EDA he researched showed it may establish boards, but they would be temporary. Other EDA members said

including the board in the bylaws makes it clear for future EDA members that an advisory board exists. Jaksa said the board grew from a citizen study and it is “essential, crucial and central” to the EDA’s efforts and therefore should be in the bylaws. Mason said inclusion of the board in the bylaws was recommended by legal counsel to acknowledge that it is part of the EDA structure. Mason’s attendance to the MidAmerica Economic Development Council’s 2014 Best Practices Conference, May 14-16, in Minneapolis at \$425 was approved, with Anderson voting no.


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