



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

The walls of Backus Community Center featured copies of The Daily Journal from 1989 during the production of “The Mill.” Ward Merrill, executive director at Backus, said everyone who stopped to glance at the headlines had a story to share of their experiences 25 years ago.

MILL

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Arts Board grant as well as funding from the local Marshall N. Knudson Family Community Fund. Backus was one of 34 recipients of the grant, which drew 90 applications and is “pretty fierce competition,” he said. The bulk of the grant was put toward the play. “The play is about a \$30,000 to \$35,000 project,” he said. “We had a total of just more than 700 people attend the play while it was here...Even if we charged \$12 for everyone, we would have made just over \$8,000 – not even a fourth of the cost of the play.” Still, the outcome seemed worth it, he said. “It is rare to get a quality group of actors to do a

play that represents the town,” Merrill said. “It was kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... People who didn’t come missed a good experience and opportunity.” Merrill said Backus staff won’t give up on seeking grants and hope to bring more plays and shows to the stage in the future. “Local people have to support the arts if they want to see the arts,” he said. “We need everybody in the community to help us.”

Eric Webster, who played “Case,” said he was anxious to see the reaction the International Falls audience had to “The Mill.”



COUNCIL

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“We’re on the cusp of an international event,” she said. The dragon boat races July 1 would build toward the July 4 Independence Day celebration, benefiting the economies of both communities by drawing people from elsewhere to visit each community, she said. Greenlaugh said she anticipates teams from Duluth and Bemidji joining with the Fort Frances teams. Boats for the event will be provided, so participating comes at no cost, she said.

“This can serve as a catalyst to enhance broader opportunities for both communities,” she told the council, adding it can showcase each community’s waterfronts. Each year could see more participants and spectators drawn to the event, she said. “It’s ours, however we want to make it,” she said. Dragon boat racing results in about 200,000 events in Canada. It started 2,500 years ago in China, when a poet died in the water and the dragons needed to be appeased, she said. “The community that enters into it is guaranteed good health, well-being and to thrive,” she said. “It sure can’t hurt,” Falls Councilor Cynthia Jaksa said, remarking on the job losses each community has recently experienced. Falls councilors said they would take part in the event. “We don’t want to run afoul of the dragons,” Mayor Bob Anderson said. “We will plan to be a part of it.” “It just seems so right for this neck of the woods,” Greenlaugh said. Councilor Paul Eklund said he’d participated in



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAUREL BEAGER

Jenny Greenlaugh, Fort Frances, encourages the International Falls City Council to participate in her city’s dragon boat races July 1.



International Falls Administrator Ken Anderson’s first day on the job included a council meeting Monday. Deputy Administrator Betty Bergstrom, at right, was recognized by the council for serving as interim administrator for 11 months.

dragon boat racing in the past and looked forward to it. “I think this was meant

younger members of the community. But Greenlaugh said an 80-year old woman paddled last year and added the sport offers involvement for people of all abilities. In addition, she said the event also offers a fund-raising opportunity. In other business Monday, the council welcomed Ken Anderson, the city’s new administrator, to his first day at work. Anderson accepted the job in February. He has served as the community development director of the city of Crosslake, Minn., and worked under the same title for the city of Columbia Heights. He holds a bachelor of arts in public administration and master of arts in urban and regional studies. Anderson said he looked forward to working with the council and the community. The council applauded Betty Bergstrom, who has served as interim administrator for the past 11 months, after former administrator Rod Ottersness left the position. Bergstrom will now return to her position as deputy administrator.

VNP

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Geological Survey economists Catherine Cullinane Thomas and Christopher Huber and Lynne Koontz for the National Park Service. According to the national report, most visitor spending supports jobs in restaurants, grocery and convenience stores (39 percent), hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts (27 percent), and other amusement and recreation (20 percent). Pete Schultz, director of the local Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the figures are a step in the right direction in taking measurements of the influence the park has on the local economy. He said the report would help to reinforce the idea tourism is a very important part of the local economy and the national park is a large part of the draw to the area. “The benefit of taking measurements is so we have benchmarks to look at and see that things are improving,” Schultz said. “And that would encourage Congress to invest more in the park, which would attract more people and contribute to local economy.” Schultz said the national park service has in the past been reluctant to provide figures. He said studies provided to the community when the park was established in 1978 estimated it would draw 1 million visitors. While the report shows VNP falls short of that estimate, the information provided can be used for comparisons in the future. Voyageurs staff has said in the past it’s been difficult

to compile visitor estimates because of the many entry points into the water-based park. Falls Chamber of Commerce Director Faye Whitbeck said the report shows the park service understands the value of the information. “I can’t wait to be able to have figures to talk about what the park brings to us,” she said. “It’s been the topic of discussion for years — how it measures up.” She credited park service staff for taking the initiative and investment to gather the figures in the report. The figures from the report would be used by the chamber to show its members how the park has influenced tourism and she said developing a percent of what businesses are used most is also valuable. “We can say ‘this is how it’s been evaluated,’” she said. “This is a good baseline going forward.” The report said in 2012 just more than 600,000 visitors stopped at the four Minnesota sites, supporting 500 jobs and spending more than \$34 million. Meanwhile, a 16-day government shutdown in October 2013 had significant effects on National Park Service visitation levels for the month and the resulting spending effects in gateway communities across the country, the report said. However, Voyageurs was among seven parks with an increase over \$500,000 in NPS related visitor spending in October 2013 compared to average October visitation. An email to local park staff for an explanation of the increase was not returned in time for this edition.

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