

# LOCALNEWS

## County staff prepare for the worst

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

When it comes to emergencies, being proactive — rather than reactive — is key, say officials who are improving the community's emergency preparedness. Koochiching County Public Health staff gathered last Wednesday at the AmericInn meeting room with community members to discuss local emergency preparedness efforts. More than a dozen community members came out to ask questions and learn more about what they can do to help in the event of a natural disaster or an emergency. Lindsi Barnhart, health educator with the Koochi-

ching County Health Department, spoke at length about the county's efforts to prepare for an emergency, as well as some of the more common issues they might run into. According to Barnhart, the top three emergency threats for Koochiching County are a chemical spill, straight line winds or a tornado, and a flu pandemic. When it comes to these issues, she said, it's only a matter of time. "It's not 'if,' it's 'when and what,'" she said. To be prepared for these potential emergencies, she said, planning and connecting with various agencies is key. A plan can only go so far, she said, but the planning process creates critical relationships. "You have to build relationships and get plans down, so you can hit the ground running when these hit," she said. Working with different agencies at the federal, state, local, and county level can be difficult, she said, but the relationships you create are beneficial when an emergency hits. Once a plan is developed, she said, it can be adapted and fit to the different kinds of emergencies the area might have to deal with. Nancy Lee, of the Koochiching County Health Department, said working with these different agencies is good, but self reliance in the face of emergency is also critical.

"You need to know you can survive on your own if you need to," she said. "We have to exhaust all our own local resources before we can get outside help." Communication in the face of emergency needs to be streamlined, Barnhart said. Mixing communication only adds to the emergency chaos, she said, so keeping things simple is important. People should also avoid relying on only one avenue of communication, she said, as it may not be available in an emergency. "If the cell towers are down or jammed, it won't be business as usual," she said. "You have to use whatever you have at your disposal."

## LOCAL TIES



AP PHOTO/ALASKA STATE TROOPERS

Otis Orth's golden retriever, Amber, and Alaska State Trooper Lucas Hegg. Amber helped keep Orth warm overnight after he crashed his snowmachine near Trapper Creek, Alaska, last week. Amber also alerted other riders to Orth's situation who rescued him. State Troopers were among responders, who transported Orth by helicopter a hospital. According to Cathy Black, long-time Journal reader, Hegg is the son of Peter Hegg, a member of the Falls High School state championship hockey team of 1964, '65 and '66, and the grandson of Stan Hegg, a hockey referee for many years in International Falls.

## Cross-border brainstorming reconvenes March 19

### Ideas sought for naming international festival

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Cross-border brainstorming sessions between International Falls and Fort Frances will reconvene next week following a winter hiatus. The March 19 session continues the joint effort of uniting and promoting a "360-degree community," according to chamber officials, referring to the idea of the two communities working as one in the endeavor. International Falls and Fort Frances chamber of commerce officials encourage members of the public to attend the next session, which is also a dinner buffet, from 6-8 p.m. March 19

at Lenard's in AmericInn, International Falls. The dinner buffet is \$9 per meal, and RSVPs are necessary whether planning to eat, or just attending the session. RSVP the Falls Chamber at 218.283.9400, or chamber@intlfalls.org; or the Fort Frances Chamber at 807.274.5773 or fort@fortfranceschamber.com. This session will provide several updates on the Falls/Fort cross-border endeavors, particularly the collection of international events planned around the celebrations of Canada Day July 1 and the United States' Independence Day July 4. Several international and regional dignitaries will be visiting the area during the summer events. Part of the agenda for this session will be brainstorming to come up with a brand or name for the sister cities' summer festival of events. All ideas and input are encouraged, according to Faye Whitbeck and Annely Armstrong-Thorstad, directors of the Falls and Fort Frances chambers, respectively. Shared interests between the Falls and Fort have grown dimensionally, according to a news release about the session. As a result, several additional topics to be covered at this session include updates on the following: the July 1 dragon boat races; the July 2 Peace pull; the July

5 Riverfest concerts; and the Heart of the Continent Partnership project with National Geographic. Those who attend should also expect to hear an update from International Falls City Councilor Cynthia Jaksa about inroads made toward the sharing of medical services between the two cities — "a milestone endeavor," according to the news release. Jaksa is scheduled to report on what is being called a "medical NAFTA" which could lead to a sharing of services across the border, such as kidney dialysis and MRIs. The cross-border gathering will also reveal volunteer, participation and coordinating opportunities for these cross-border efforts.

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