

LOCALNEWS

Back to the mats: Board could consider program for next year

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

It's been 20 years since a Falls wrestler participated in a match at the high school level. Next year, that could be a different story.

The Falls School Board Monday agreed to allow a group of its members to begin discussions about the possibility of entering into a high-school level wrestling cooperative with North Woods High School in Cook.

"The superintendent of the Cook area has invited me to go down and start talking to him," said board member Mike Holden, who has been a long-time outspoken advocate for wrestling. "Now's the time to do it."

Any decision will have to wait until next season, however, because a cooperative agreement has to be in place 30 days prior to the start of the season, according to Kevin Grover, Falls athletic director.

"If we're thinking of entertaining wrestling, let's get the discussion going, let's keep it timely," Grover said.

The idea of the cooperative with North Woods surfaced last month when Pete Benedix, who coaches the local youth Mighty Mustangs wrestling team, brought the suggestion to the board.

Benedix said a growing concern among the local wrestling athletes and their parents is that

the children are competing from 4 years old into eighth grade and must stop their involvement in the sport without continuation of a wrestling program.

"We're very successful in the youth program," he said. "I want to give the kids the opportunity I had to go beyond (wrestling) in the eighth grade."

Benedix, a 1991 FHS graduate, was part of the school's wrestling program before 1992, when the program, along with boys swimming, was cut from the Falls' athletic programs in order to equalize the number of boys and girls sports offered. Both teams were later reinstated after parents groups raised necessary funds to operate the sports through the following season.

However, in 1993, wrestling's weak participation prompted the school board to eliminate the sport which helped bring more balance to the school's sports programs, which had been dominated by boys.

Board members Monday asked if Title IX, which requires schools that receive federal funds to provide girls and women with equal opportunity to compete in sports, would be impacted should they choose to co-op with North Woods.

"My understanding is it used to be if you had six boys sports, you needed six girls sports," Grover said of Title IX. "It looks at percentages (of boys and

girls athletes) now."

Should the board choose to co-op or establish its own high-school level wrestling program, Grover said the percentage of boys participating in sports has room to increase without having to add a girls sport. But, he added, the percentage is figured out annually and could change as enrollment fluctuates.

On the same note, Grover said if the board moves forward with North Woods, it needs to consider the possibility of future requests for other sports and schools to co-op.

"If you do it for one, you have to do it for another," he said. "We would need to keep that in mind...If the board is against a co-op of any sort, there is no sense looking at wrestling."

Board member Willi Kostiuk asked what the downside to co-oping would be.

Falls Superintendent Nurdy Nelson said cost and distance between co-oping schools are factors that could have a negative effect.

Benedix said he is aware of the logistics involved with establishing a co-op, but vowed he would be persistent with the board until a program was formed.

"I feel we need to give that opportunity back to this school and the community," he said of wrestling. "We'll build that school spirit back up... We'll sell the gym out, I guarantee you."

KEDA outlines 2014 plan

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching Economic Development Authority Board Wednesday reviewed its work plan for 2014, outlining primary goals for next year.

The plan is divided into three primary goals: pursue projects that lead to job creation and investment, continue to work with other communities to market assets to potential clients, and continue to oversee and work with internal KEDA functions or affiliate organizations.

"This is an evolution of how we look at the work effort here," KEDA Director Paul Nevanen said.

The work plan doesn't change radically from year to year, Nevanen said, because the overall mission statement of recruiting new business and encouraging expansion and business retention in Koochiching County remains the same.

Pursuing projects that lead to job creation and investment involves marketing the foreign trade zone, working with the project team on the Renewable Energy Clean Air Project, managing the cold weather testing facility, and assisting the county in pursuit of funding from the state's bonding bill, according to the plan.

KEDA is working with Point Trade Services, a

Florida-based company, on the application process to expand the borders of the FTZ to include all of Koochiching County.



Paul Nevanen



Wade Pavleck



Bob Anderson

Point Trade Services can also help with marketing the FTZ as an asset for the county, Nevanen said.

"We continue to develop and add contacts to our network of people in any of these areas that can help us promote the area," Nevanen said.

While the cold weather testing facility is currently at capacity for testing, KEDA member Bob Anderson said it might be beneficial to look at other industries that might need cold weather testing. Anderson also serves as the International Falls mayor.

"Bob and I are always looking for ways to make the airport more viable for the future, and testing is certainly one of the ways to do that," KEDA member Wade Pavleck said. Pavleck is also a Koochiching County commissioner.

KEDA will continue to work with communities like Northome, International Falls, and Littlefork to market business parks and other site assets in the county, Nevanen said.

"It's about reach, and it's about making people aware of what we're trying to do up here," he said.

The KEDA will also continue to develop a map of the broadband Internet service in the county, as it becomes a critical asset when luring potential businesses, Anderson said.

"We've got to get a handle on this thing, because I think it's going to play a larger role in our development in the future," Anderson said.

KEDA will also continue to work with its affiliate organizations like the Small Business Development Center, cold weather testing facility, Koochiching Community Development Authority, and other outside organizations those agencies work with, Nevanen said.

When it comes to driving the county towards economic prosperity, a work plan functions as a road map, Nevanen said.

"This is kind of a road map, subject to any additional input," he said. "But it shows where we're going to focus our energy."

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