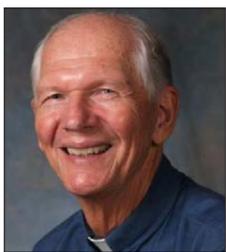


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Fred Danner's house and garage along "Griswold Lane" (Washington Street) in Cleveland features an extensive collection of decorations and thousands of lights. (Pat Beck/southernminn.com)

LIGHTING THE WAY

Christmas displays brighten the mood during unusual holiday period

By CARSON HUGES and PAT BECK

In this season of the pandemic, people need a positive diversion wherever they can find it, and residents of communities like Cleveland, St. Peter and Le Center are providing.

Cleveland

Three homeowners — Rick Lloyd and Renee Koch, Mike and Lathea Sargent, and Fred Danner — have transformed Washington Street in Cleveland into "Griswold Lane."

The parade of Christmas lights from home to home gives even the eponymous Clark Griswold from "Christmas Vacation" a run for his money. Each home carries its own unique spin on Christmas decorating. The Sargent's home has been nicknamed the "Hallmark House" by Koch for their elegant display of white lights adorning their home.

Lloyd and Koch each aim for a more kitschy Christmas with a pa-

rade of Santas, reindeer, snowmen, penguins and every lawn decoration imaginable. Colored lights are projected onto the house, and speakers play classic Christmas carols in the evening. On the Danner home, passersby can read a large sign welcoming travelers to Griswold Lane and even a stoplight decorated in red bulbs with permission from the city of Cleveland.

Visitors can also see the Tree of Christmas Past by the stop sign. The tree is put up by Danner every year for people to leave ornaments commemorating their lost loved ones. After the Christmas season, Danner saves the ornaments so that when the next Christmas rolls around people can come back to pick up their ornament and be reminded of what they wrote.

Danner usually purchases a live evergreen tree for the stop, but with the COVID-19 pandemic souring spirits, Lloyd and Koch decided to surprise him by purchasing an artifi-



Visitors to Griswold Lane may hang an ornament in honor of a lost loved one on the tree of Christmas past. (Carson Hughes/southernminn.com)

cial tree to put out on the lot, spreading around some of their own decorations.

"There was a bunch of stuff that made him say 'Bah, humbug' this year," said Koch. "So we said, 'We're going to show you. We're going to make your house look a little bit more pleasant.' And he got out of his funk and started putting up decorations too."

Spreading Christmas cheer is what the display is all about for Koch and Lloyd, and it's what has motivated this Cleveland neighborhood to carry on the tradition for 15 years.

"It's so fun to watch," said Lloyd. "The kids press up against the window as they're driving by. That's what it's all about."

See LIGHTS on 3A

School district hopes to begin returning students, starting with youngest

By PHILIP WEYHE
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The St. Peter School District is prepared to start bringing students back into schools for in-person learning, but it won't happen immediately and plans remain tentative as COVID-19 numbers continue to change.

A new learning model plan, approved by the St. Peter School Board at its Dec. 21 meeting, calls for early learners to return to full in-person learning first (Jan. 11), followed by elementary students (Jan. 19), and then, depending on county rates, middle and high school students (potentially February). The plan comes off the back of new guidance from the state of Minnesota, which emphasizes getting the youngest students back into schools.

Recent data, public health experts say, indicate that middle and high school students are impacted by and react to the virus similarly to adults, while younger children are less likely to spread the virus and do so at slower rates. There is also evidence to indicate that elementary students are most impacted by the lack of in-person learning opportunities.

"They really want to see the younger students back, much like we all do, so they're not so much focusing on the county level data for the lower grade levels," Superintendent Bill Gronseth said of the state's guidance.

ATHLETICS AND ACTIVITIES

The state of Minnesota is allowing high school sports and activities to resume practice beginning Jan. 4. St. Peter Public Schools plans to begin with that date. However, a starting date for games and competitions is yet to be determined.

See SCHOOL on 3A



(File photo/southernminn.com)

Businesses should update info with state to access new funding

By PHILIP WEYHE
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Businesses in Le Sueur and Nicollet counties are advised to update their information with the state in anticipation of receiving funding via a new round of COVID-19 relief grants.

First, the state will award grants with direct payments. On Dec. 14, the Minnesota Department of Revenue was authorized to distribute \$88 million to restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries, bowling alleys, bars, and fitness/recreation centers to receive direct payments from the state. A second round of direct payments will go to movie theaters and civic centers.

It is critical for businesses to log into their accounts with the state to confirm or update their

information, because the payments are based on business type, number of employees and sales tax loss data. These state grants will range in size from \$10,000 to \$45,000.

To verify business addresses, log into e-Services at mndor.state.mn.us/tp/eservices/.

If you have questions about your business category or number of employees, check with Minnesota Unemployment Insurance, uimn.org.

These steps are important for business owners because of how the state will evaluate and notify businesses of the grants. "We will determine what businesses are eligible and their aid amount based on sales tax and unemployment records as of Nov. 1, 2020," the state said.

Then, eligible businesses will be notified via their e-Services ac-

count by Dec. 31. Payments will then be mailed in early January to the main address on the sales tax account.

County programs

The Minnesota Legislature also approved \$660,000 for grants to small businesses and nonprofits to be administered by Nicollet County, while Le Sueur County will receive over \$556,000 for the same purpose.

Nicollet County Administrator Ryan Krosch confirmed the county will be establishing a new business grant program, but it is waiting on more funding details from the state, and the Board of Commissioners will work out the specifics of the program, likely at a Jan. 5 work session and meeting.

See FUNDING on 3A (File photo/southernminn.com)



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