



What is this holiday celebrated by our neighbors to the north? While its origins are unknown, it became a day to give to the poor and for employers to give a gift to their employees. Today, it's celebrated with shopping, soccer games, visiting and drinking, and eating Christmas leftovers.

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HORSE RIDE



Monte Mowry is spearheading an organization helping those with special needs by having them ride horses on a monthly basis during the summer months. Mowry, who lives south of Owatonna, says the benefits he wants participants to receive are numerous and don't involve himself. (Sam Wilmes/southernminn.com)

Man accused of drive-by shooting looked to get rid of demons, the devil

By SUZANNE ROOK
editor@apgsomn.com

A Clarks Grove man who reportedly spoke to sheriff's investigators about demons and the devil, has been charged with firing into the home of a man whose guns he stole.

Kirk Allen Voelker, 41, was charged Wednesday with three felonies, including shooting into an occupied home, second-degree assault and possession of firearms by a felon.

Authorities first learned Voelker was behaving erratically when a family member called Faribault police Monday evening to report that Voelker was "acting strange and possibly under the influence of something." The caller told police they believed Voelker had fired a gun outside their residence before leaving the area.

About four hours later, Rice County deputies responded to a report from a Cedar Lake Boulevard resident that someone fired shots into their home and they believed Voelker was responsible. The resident reportedly told police they were in their bedroom when they heard gunshots, and quickly dropped to the ground and called 911.

The resident told authorities Voelker had stolen firearms from their residence a few days before and a knife the night prior, according to court documents.

Deputies reported seeing bullet holes throughout the residence and the attached garage. Three vehicles parked in the driveway were also damaged by gunshots. Investigators reportedly recovered .223 shell casings and 12 shell casings on and near the roadway in front of the residence.

While deputies were still at the Cedar Lake Boulevard home, Faribault police officers located Voelker's vehicle in the city and pulled him over.

Voelker reportedly had a hatchet strapped to his left side, and was initially non-compliant, reportedly talking about "the bad things going on." He was later taken into custody and transported to the Rice County Jail.

During a search of Voelker's vehicle, officers reportedly found two assault rifles, loaded and with a bullet in their chambers, magazines and spent rifle cartridges. A backpack located on the vehicle floor reportedly contained a large knife.

See SHOOTING on 2A

A NEEDED RIDE

Owatonna man delivers rides, life-changing help to those with special needs

By SAM WILMES
samuel.wilmes@apgsomn.com

Sitting in his home south of Owatonna on a cold December morning, Monte Mowry was asked to describe what stands out to him the most about his leadership of Ride for the Brand over the last five years.

Though the positive memories he has leading the program designed to help those ages 5 to 25 with special needs by pairing them with horses are numerous, one memory centered around a sister and brother who were initially

scared of riding horses stood out, brought him to tears, and showed how much he cares for those with special needs.

"She had a 4-year-old brother that also was disabled but he wasn't old enough," Mowry said. "She asked if she could bring him. I don't think they've missed a year ... that's what it's all about."

Wanting to give back

The idea was sparked in 2014 during a conversation Mowry had with his wife Nancy and friends about how to give back to his community.

Mowry had attended the Waseca-based Special Horses for Special People, a program more focused on the adult population, and felt there was a similar local need for children with disabilities. That realization sparked the collaboration Ride for the Brand has with the Advocates for Developmentally Disabled, an organization tasked with helping school-aged children.

"I just thought it would be something to give back with," Mowry said.



A horse interacts with Teresa Louks' uncle at Koda Living Community. (Photo courtesy of Monte Mowry)

See RIDE on 2A

2020 Faribault Rotarian of the Year winner enjoys giving back

By MISTY SCHWAB
misty.schwab@apgsomn.com

"Eric Craig is a 'do everything' kind of Rotarian," according to Dick Huston.

In just over five years of involvement with the Faribault club, Craig has shown that he, as fellow Rotarian Huston said, "definitely lives the 'service above self' model of Rotary."

"From selling the most roses for fundraisers to helping with the clothing drive in the winter time, from helping at blood drives to working at the camp, Eric is first and foremost ready to go," Huston said.

Just before the Faribault Rotary's virtual Christmas concert, the club recognized Craig as the 2020 Faribault Rotarian of the Year in a Dec. 16 online meeting.

"I was extremely honored, extremely surprised and humbled," Craig said. "You have a group of

60 Rotarians, and they give their time, and their families give time, and any one of them would be deserving. I was extremely honored and humbled to be recognized by my peers."

Craig grew up in Faribault, and after living in St. Paul for about a decade, returned to his hometown about 10 years ago. He joined the Faribault Rotary Club in September 2015, making him a relatively new member.

His involvement with the Faribault Rotary Club started with his employer at JOD Limited, where he's worked for the past 11 years. His business partner at the time, Gary Demro, had been a 40-year member of the Faribault Rotary and said to Craig, "My time is up, and I want you to join."

Craig said he plans to be a life-long member of Rotary.

"The most important thing, the thing that influences me the most, is the people, who give back



Faribault Rotarian Eric Craig was named the 2020 Faribault Rotarian of the Year Dec. 16 via online streaming. Craig grew up in Faribault and joined the local club in September 2015. He had previously been recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow. (Photo courtesy of Dick Huston)

through service or monetary, in most cases it's both," Craig said. "It's just really humbling to be a part of a bigger cause."

In the past five years, Craig

has participated in Rotary volunteerism and project fundraising in a number of capacities.

He has volunteered with Red Cross blood drives, a winter cloth-

ing drive called Warm Our Community, Meals on Wheels, and Salvation Army bell ringing for the Red Kettle Campaign. Next year, he said the Faribault Rotary

Club plans to participate in the Adopt a Highway program.

In Craig's first year in the club, the Rotary held a fundraiser for a community project, "buddy benches," which gives children a place to make friends if they feel alone at recess. He also helped the club raise funds for the Rotary mural on the Vacuum and Sewing Center downtown.

Even while traveling abroad, Craig can't get enough of Rotary. Since there are clubs in around 220 countries, and members are welcome to join meetings held around the globe, Craig has taken full advantage of those opportunities when possible. He and his wife, Sara, attended a Rotary meeting in London, England, while on their honeymoon. They also attended a meeting in Dublin, Ireland, where Rotary's first club outside the U.S. was established.

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