

LE SUEUR COUNTY NEWS



LOCAL
Longtime Le Sueur lawyer and volunteer honored as grand marshal
2A



FALL FESTIVAL
Fall Harvest: 2020 Le Sueur County 4-H winners announced
6B

Published by APG Media of Southern Minnesota

Vol. 3, No. 39 ©2020

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

www.lesueurcountynews.com

\$1.25 Newsstand

County uses CARES dollars for new disability, mental health and financial services

By CARSON HUGHES
carson.hughes@apgsomn.com

Those struggling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic may have new opportunities for financial and health assistance.

On Sept. 15, Le Sueur County invested more than \$500,000 in CARES Act funds to human services providers, including disability services, financial and housing assistance, telehealth and more.

One of the many providers benefitting from these funds is MRCI (Managed Resource Connections Inc.), which provides job coaching, training, employment services as well as day services for adults with disabilities. With a one-time payment of \$69,000 from the county, MRCI will be expanding its coverage area from locations like Mankato and New Ulm into Le Sueur County.

The expansion could have a great impact on people with disabilities in the area. The county saw Le Sueur County Developmental Services, which provided employment and life skills services to more than 50 adults with disabilities, permanently close last summer amid financial losses from shutting down operations during COVID-19.

"This will hopefully help pick up some of those from LCDS with the closing and service those folks as well," said Le Sueur County Commissioner Steve Rohlfling.

To make services accessible during the pandemic, MRCI has been providing a number of virtual programs including check-ins, small group peer activities, career advice and skills training and employment services.

"It is exciting to work with them and they have a really good plan," said Sue Rynda, Le Sueur County director of human services. "They want to hire someone in Le Sueur County and work on community jobs and support people virtually. They have lots of clubs and activities. I think providers and guardians and those that we serve are very excited about this opportunity."

That's not all the county is spending their CARES dollar on. To expand access to a variety of human services, Le Sueur County has contracted Minnesota Valley Action Council for \$266,000 in emergency assistance. The nonprofit aims to empower low income-earners through a variety of programs that include employment and training, housing assistance, energy assistance and financial advice. Different programs have different eligibility requirements, often based on income level.

"A lot of the things we're hoping to help families with, anything from housing to car repairs to getting them caught up with utility bills, just a variety of things," said Tiffany Vanden Einde, a vocational advisor at MVAC.

See CARES on 3A



TCU Lonsdale kindergartners prepare to listen to a book their teacher, Ellie Ryan, read to them on the first day of school Thursday.

Hybrid Learning

Educators adjust to new ways of teaching in the pandemic

By CARSON HUGHES
carson.hughes@apgsomn.com

The start of the new school year has come with its own set of unique challenges for educators. Between on-line learning, reduced class sizes and a mask mandate, schooling looks a lot different than in previous years. But after a semester of distance learning last spring, teachers are happy to be seeing their students in class again.

"It went very well; the day went very fast," TCU Lonsdale second-grade teacher Abby Brockway said after the first day of school. "It was nice to have the excitement of the students and the staff in the building, and even though you couldn't see their smiles, you could just hear the excitement in their voices."

Local school districts including TCU, Le Sueur-Henderson, St. Peter and Cleveland have all debuted hybrid models this year to accommodate COVID-19 which come with a whole host

of changes. One of the most significant is reduced class sizes. Guidelines for the hybrid model mandate that classrooms be at 50% capacity, so local districts have split students into two different groups. Each group alternates days and attends school in-person twice a week. One day a week is reserved for all distance learning.

TCU Lonsdale fourth-grade teacher Megan Warner leads a class of 11 students in-person on "Group A" days and a class of eight on "Group B" days, but the whole class comes together through Google Meets projected on a TV screen. Students at home will log on from school-distributed Chromebooks in the afternoon during read aloud time. Unlike last year, during distance learning, Warner can teach lessons in person and allow students time to apply their skills at home.

"I think with the smaller class sizes we were able to really instruct on the first day," Warner said. "With the

classes split in half to a smaller group, everyone had a chance to talk."

Brockway agreed that spending one on one time with students is an advantage to the smaller class sizes. On the first day of school especially, this allowed for more time to establish routines, answer questions, and get to know one another.

Consistency

Creating that level of consistency was a big focus of Le Sueur-Henderson Middle School/High School Social Studies Teacher Rick Bruns. Since students have been out of the classroom for much longer than usual, Bruns said that it has been harder for his pupils to adjust back to learning in school again. It has also been challenging to get students to consistently be on Zoom when they aren't in the classroom.

"I asked them yesterday how they were feeling and the overwhelming

response was they are getting a lot of work," said Bruns. "Admittedly, coming off of spring there really wasn't quite a demand on students and they feel a little bit overwhelmed right now. But it's amazing to have these kids back, to be in the building with them; they get to be with their friends and things like that. I think part of it is getting back into that routine again."

Hybrid learning has also introduced more reliance on technology in the classroom than Bruns and students are used to. During class, half the students will be at their desks while the other half will be following along on Zoom. A few students over Zoom will occasionally be dropped from the call due to a poor internet connection, so Bruns has to spend some time catching students up to speed and finding out what they may have missed.

See HYBRID on 3A

Le Sueur holds public hearing on assessments for 2020 construction

By CARSON HUGHES
carson.hughes@apgsomn.com

With construction underway on the old Hwy. 112 and now County Road 22 turnback project, along with all the Le Sueur city roads included in the project, the city of Le Sueur is now preparing to levy special assessments.

Community members attended an online public hearing on Sept. 14 before the Le Sueur City Council to ask questions and give feedback about the special assessments scheduled to be levied on Sept. 28. Attendees spoke over the webinar and submitted emailed statements to the council to participate.

The proposed special assessments total approximately \$1.5 million between 143 properties in the city. The assessments make up a quarter of the total \$5.6 million the city owes to the project out of a total \$17.5 million being spent between the city and Le Sueur County.

Assessments would be divided into four districts, which will subsidize different project costs. About \$36,000 in mill and overlay costs would be levied on homes around Ferry

Street east of Elmwood Ave. Reclamation costs amounting to \$483,000 will be paid by properties along Commerce Street. Properties along Elmwood Avenue, Ferry Street west of Elmwood and Bridge Street would cover \$873,000 for urban residential reconstruction. \$95,000 in rural reconstruction costs would be paid by properties at the south end of Elmwood.

Those who are assessed will have multiple payment options. Property owners may cover the full costs of their assessment in the very first year and pay no interest. They may also partially prepay without interest and have the remaining amount rolled over into their county taxes. If a property owner takes no action to prepay, they would have their balance put on taxes which would be paid over 15 years with a 3% interest rate.

The rest of the city's costs are shared by residents which have already been factored in utility bills. Assessed properties would pay the the taxed amount on top of what is included in utility bills.

See ASSESSMENTS on 3A



The city of Le Sueur held a public hearing on assessments relating to the Hwy. 112/County Road 22 turnback project. The council will make a determination on assessments at the Sept. 28 council meeting. (Carson Hughes/Le Sueur County News)

CONTACT US

editor@apgsomn.com
classifieds@apgsomn.com
circulation@apgsomn.com
News: 507-931-8569
Sports: 507-931-8566

COMING UP

Continued coverage on the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 on local communities, plus other local news and sports.

ONLINE

Check out videos, photo galleries and community calendar.



Or find us on Facebook & Twitter

NEWS TIP?

Contact the newsroom or sports desk at 507-665-3333 if you know of any news or sports you think our readers would be interested in reading about.



INDEX

LOCAL 2A-2A, 7A-8A // OPINION 4A // RECORDS 6A // SPORTS 1B-3B, 6B // CLASSIFIEDS 4B-5B