



Rock County STAR HERALD

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Thursday, April 3, 2025

District to cut nine school personnel

By Mavis Fodness

Five full-time teachers and four full-time support staff members will lose their jobs at Luverne Public Schools at the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

The decision was reached in a regular meeting of the school board March 25 and will be further discussed at the special school board meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 10.

Administrators will present a list of names to the board to include three elementary teachers, two middle-high school teachers, one secretary and three paraprofessionals.

An estimated \$550,000 in salary and benefits savings is projected. The district faces a projected shortfall of \$1.097 million.

Suggested savings presented March 25 included eliminating an additional teacher from the middle-high school, due to several unknowns going into the 2025-26 school year, according to Superintendent Craig Oftedahl.

"We're a little uncertain of what the new school in town is going to do, and so there's some uncertainty with our enrollment," he said, referring to the Christian school starting in the American Reformed

SEE DISTRICT CUTS ▶ 3A



Mavis Fodness photo/0403 Tack Swap 2025

Crowds reach 300 for Rock Ranch Tack Swap fundraiser

More than 300 people attended the 2025 Tack Swap and Vendor Fair Saturday at Rock Ranch near Hills. The four-hour event featured 27 vendors and three guest speakers sharing information about horse care and horseback riding. Speakers included Jerry Jones from Garretson pictured above showing correct saddle placement. Also pictured are Rock Ranch barn manager Jessica Richters (center), and Rock Ranch owner Marie LaRock holding the horse. Other speakers were Kysa Gilkerson, Brookings, about proper bit selection and April Kelling, Brandon, about equine nutrition. This is the first year Rock Ranch partnered with the Rock River Wranglers Saddle Club for the event, which raised \$2,400 for the Rock Ranch equine-assisted therapy program.

Equalization meetings start next week to answer landowner questions

By Mavis Fodness

Property owners can question assessed market values during annual Board of Appeal and Equalization (BOAE) meetings beginning next week.

(A list of the scheduled meetings is printed on page 7. Most cities conduct BOAE meetings during their regular monthly meeting times.)

Property owners have one last appeal meeting when Rock County Commissioners conduct their BOAE at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 18.

Rachel Jacobs, director of the Rock County Land Records Office, previewed value changes at the commissioners' meeting on March 18.

Jacobs said no changes

in value were made to agricultural land based on the 27 sales that occurred from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024.

The average sale prices for ag land fell within the state-mandated value limits between 90 and 105 percent of the sale market.

However, Jacobs explained she did unify building site values throughout

the county based on the past five years.

She set a base value for the first acre of the building site at \$25,000. She explained the first acre encompasses electric and water hookups.

The rest of the building site acres are now unified at \$12,000 per acre.

Prior to setting base values, per acre amounts

ranged from \$5,000 an acre to \$18,000 an acre.

As a result, some properties had their base values lowered.

"We were one of the last counties who were still having different types of building site values. The rest of the region evened out their building sites 10 years ago,"

SEE EQUALIZATION ▶ 3A



Lori Sorenson photo/0403 fatal crash

Markings on the shoulder of the road along Highway 23 show where the Minnesota State Patrol mapped the March 27 fatal crash involving two Rock County drivers.

Vehicular homicide charges filed in Highway 23 fatal crash

By Lori Sorenson

Vehicular homicide charges have been filed in the case of the fatal crash on Highway 23 in western Rock County March 27.

According to the criminal complaint signed Tuesday morning, 21-year-old Jayson Delfs, Hardwick, faces felony charges of criminal vehicular homicide.

He's accused of operating a vehicle with negligence — under the influence of alcohol, resulting in the death of a 47-year-old rural Jasper man, Grant Crawford.

According to the Rock County Sheriff's Office, dispatch received an iPhone crash alert at 10:43

SEE FATAL CRASH ▶ 5A

Local couple buys Luverne Taco John's franchise

By Lori Sorenson

Stan and Tracy Wieneke, Adrian, are the new owners of the Luverne Taco John's franchise, which has been part of the community for over 30 years.

They purchased Wildflowers Coffee Boutique in downtown Luverne in July 2019 and will continue to own and operate both the coffee shop and Taco John's in Luverne.

"Nothing is changing at Wildflowers. We have very capable people there," Tracy said. "They don't need me so much anymore, and they make it possible for us to do this."

The couple said they'll split their time between the two restaurants, overseeing both operations.

However, they'll invest extra time and resources this year into Taco John's, which is undergoing a refresh along with the other Taco John's franchises in 2025.

The makeover includes updated signage and refreshed color palettes inside and outside.

The company also upgraded its technology by incorporating a cloud-based POS system and a digital ordering system.

In addition to a new look, the Luverne Taco John's may have additional hours in the future.

The Wienekes bought the Luverne Taco John's from Ron Christianson, who has operated it



Lori Sorenson photo/0403 taco johns new owners

Stan and Tracy Wieneke (left) purchased the Luverne Taco John's from Ron Christianson (right). The Wienekes also own the downtown Luverne Wildflowers Coffee Boutique, which will be unaffected by their South Highway 75 venture.

for the past 20 years along with a Taco John's franchise in Litchfield near his home.

He said he'll continue owning that location but looks forward to no longer driving 2 1/2 hours, even though he'll miss doing business in Luverne.

"People here are like family to me," Christianson said. "It's a people business. I enjoy working the window."

The Wienekes said they've enjoyed

being part of the Luverne community and look forward to their new local investment.

"The community is so supportive," Tracy said. "They were there for us, and we want to be there for them."

The Wienekes' children are 17, 14 and 13 and attend school in Luverne and also help in the Wildflowers restaurant.



WHAT'S INSIDE

Opinion 4A
Obituaries 7A
Church 4B

Sports 1B
Public Notices 5B
Classifieds 7B

HOW TO REACH US

507-283-2333 | editor@star-herald.com | PO Box 837, Luverne, MN 56156



WWW.STAR-HERALD.COM

Luverne, MN 56156 USPS 468-040

Volume 150, Number 14