



Rock County STAR HERALD

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Chamber makes plans for lighted Christmas

Community urged to be part of lighted displays with 'Polar Express' train theme

By Lori Sorenson

A Christmas lighted train engine will join the 2021 community holiday plans, which kick off with fireworks Nov. 28 in Luverne City Park.

Ellis and Eastern Railroad will transport Santa and Mrs. Claus through several communities on Sunday, Nov. 28, ending in Luverne in time for the grand lighting of decorated city park.

"We really want this to be special for kids and the community," said Chamber Director Jane Wildung Lanphere.

She's encouraging individuals, businesses and organizations to start planning now to be part of the effort.

"Anyone is welcome to be part of the fun," Lanphere said.

The city park will be open on Nov. 1 for people to start putting up displays. Security cameras will be in place to deter vandalism, or at least record activity for restitution.

All displays should be in place and ready to turn on by Nov. 26.

"If everyone does a little bit, we can have every tree and bush decorated in the park," she said. "We're doing everything we can do to make it extra festive."

The theme this year is trains, along the lines of the "Polar Express" children's story, and people are encouraged to follow the theme, but may use any theme they would like.

Prizes will be awarded for displays in the categories of "Polar Express" theme, brightest display

Lighted Christmas/see page 3A



Luverne's Ryan Johnson addresses flag football teams following their final Saturday morning games Oct. 9 west of the Luverne School campus.

Young athletes learn football basics, guidance for teamwork and life skills

Photos and story by Lori Sorenson

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

Philippians 4:13 was the Bible verse of the day for young flag football players who gathered after their recent Saturday morning games.

Every Saturday morning since Sept. 11, the west edge of Luverne would come alive with hundreds of elementary-age flag football players in jerseys touting team names like Broncos, Vikings, Falcons and others.

Softball diamonds, soccer fields and grassy areas in between were divided into kid-sized football fields surrounded by parents, grandparents and other fans in lawn chairs and on blankets.

More than 300 players on 28 teams come to Luverne from five different communities — Luverne, Edgerton, Hills-Beaver Creek, Adrian and Rock Rapids. Teams are organized by age in grades 1-6 through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.



Assistant coach Gavin Reick prays with his Edgerton team following their game.

'Humbling' growth

FCA is an international non-profit Christian sports ministry with chapters in nearly all sports for all ages and incorporates Christian principles into team playing. The Luverne FCA Flag

Football league started six years ago when Ryan Johnson was looking for an FCA flag football team for his son.

"I learned that if I wanted a team, I should start one," Johnson said.

That first year 120 local players participated, and the program has tripled in numbers since then.

"I've been blown away — and humbled — by the growth of it and how it has reached so many people and how it has benefited so many kids," Johnson said.

Coaches and teams work on the fundamentals of football, teamwork and physical conditioning. And they learn what it means to be an athlete and a Christian.

"They learn the message of Christ and they learn how to grow and become better people," Johnson said. "They learn how to be patient, how to be a teammate and how to be a competitor."

FCA flag football/continued on 3A

Rock Ranch joins Arenas For Change

Program expands local use of horses in mental health therapy

By Mavis Fodness

Rock Ranch, located west of Hills, recently expanded its equine-assisted psychotherapy services (EAP) and joined the nationwide organization Arenas for Change.

The therapeutic process uses horses as tools for improving mental health.

Rock Ranch founder Marie LaRock said Arenas for Change is a promising new resource to support and expand the Ranch's EAP services.

"Therapy in this program is for everybody," she said. "It is a matter of creating your story and working through it."

The Ranch is already certified in Eagala equine therapy (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association), which uses horses as a safe place for clients to overcome specific trauma issues.

Arenas for Change is a network of mental health professionals who share

Rock Ranch/see page 3A



Mavis Fodness photo/1007 Rock Ranch Joins ARCH

Rock Ranch, located west of Hills, recently joined 15 other therapeutic riding facilities in Arenas for Change and formed a local equine-assisted therapy team of (from left) barn manager Jessica Richters, office manager Staci Bundesen, Natasha Kellenberger, Lynne Hunter, Marie LaRock, Carissa Palmberg, Dolores Bundesen, Patti Swenson and Jill Jonnes-Kuca.

Driver sentenced to 30 days in crash that took life of 22-year-old Brooke Thompson

By Mavis Fodness

A South Dakota circuit court judge sentenced 36-year-old Nicholas Floyd to 30 days for his reckless driving conviction in the 2019 crash that took the life of 22-year-old Brooke Thompson, Luverne.

Floyd initially faced a second-degree manslaughter charge, a felony with a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. However, a plea agreement earlier this year reduced the charges to reckless driving.

Floyd was the driver of the 2011 Peterbilt Conventional box truck that struck Brooke's vehicle in an I-90 construction zone near Brandon on July 23, 2019.

Floyd's reckless driving conviction is a misdemeanor that could carry a maximum penalty of 365 days in jail.

In a letter to court, the Thompson family wrote, "Any possible sentence for a misdemeanor reckless charge is a mere slap on the wrist compared to the

Sentencing/continued on 5A



Hills council proposes 4.9 percent levy increase

By Mavis Fodness

In a special Sept. 21 meeting, the Hills City Council set the preliminary amount received from local property taxes at 4.9 percent higher than last year's amount.

In 2022 the city will collect \$139,701, up \$6,845 from the previous year.

The total 2022 city budget will be \$354,141.

The extra levy amount covers the increase in the law enforcement contract with the Rock County Sheriff's Office. Hills will pay \$14,771 more or \$39,026 for services in 2022.

Council members discussed the 2022 budget at their Sept. 14 meeting before adopting the preliminary levy percent at the Sept. 21 special meeting.

Each line item in the city's budget was discussed, including those of city utilities.

They approved increasing water rates \$1 per increment plus another \$1 for garbage pickup to \$19 per month. Sewer rates remain the same.

Council members also plan to replace equipment (\$15,000) in the parks department as well as the continued improvement of the city's infrastructure.

For 2022 Hills will have \$68,355 from the federal government's American Rescue Plan to spend on water and/or sanitary sewer improvements. Cities have until 2024 to spend the ARP funds.

Council members will conduct a Truth-in-Taxation meeting for 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 14, to finalize the 2022 budget and set the final levy amount. Council members can reduce the current preliminary 4.9 percent increase. They cannot increase the percentage.

Auditor: 'Pretty healthy fund balance'

Amy Mollberg, a certified public accountant with Meulebroek, Taubert & Co. in Luverne, recently presented the 2020 City of Hills audit report.

Overall she gave the city an "unqualified clean opinion," the best rating the city could receive.

Mollberg commended city officials for their healthy general fund balance of 23 months.

"If you got zero more dollars, you could sustain (the same level of businessness) for 23 months without any more revenue," she said.

"The state recommends five to six months — you guys have a pretty healthy fund balance."



Photo courtesy of Ryan Johnson

The final games of the FCA Flag Football league in Luverne were played Saturday night under the lights of Cardinal Field. There were 325 players on 28 teams in grades 1-6 from five different communities involved in the local league, which teaches principles of the game and Christian living.

FCA Flag Football League in Luverne/continued from page 1A

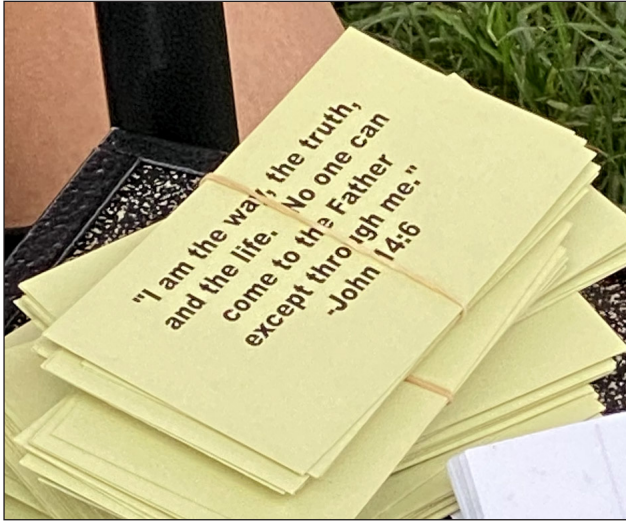
Following their 9:30 a.m. Saturday games, players huddled with their teams to review play highlights and to bow their heads in prayer.

Then all the teams gathered for a final huddle to review their Bible verse of the week and what it means for them as athletes and as Christians. Players who could recite the verse from memory when called on were rewarded with T-shirts or footballs.

Guest speakers (some from the NHL and NFL) each week addressed the group huddles about what it means to be a Christian both on and off the field.

At their final Saturday morning game on Oct. 9, they heard from Greg Loy, a pastor in Rochester who played college basketball.

He used a boomerang as a "greater than" or "less than" math symbol and encouraged the athletes to think "less than" themselves and put others



Each week, the players learned Bible verses. The final verse was John 14:6, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

before themselves.

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less," Loy said. "The Bible says it this way: Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but honor one another above yourself."

He said it's true in relationships, families, marriages, church congregations, neighborhoods, at work, in school and also on athletic teams.

For the love of the game ... and love for the kids

The flag football season wrapped up Saturday night on Cardinal Field in Luverne. "It was really neat for the kids when the lights came on," Johnson said.

He and Charlotte have three children (second, sixth and eighth grade) and he's the Luverne High School principal. Organizing the FCA flag football league makes his life busier, but he said it's worth his time.

"I do it because I love football, and I love the message that FCA provides," Johnson said.

"But mostly, I love working with kids. It's a joy to see kids learning to be part of a team ... the thrill of winning and the sting of defeat and learning how to be a competitor and how to respond to coaches and referees."

Registration for the 2022 season begins in June at southdakotafca.org. There is a flag football tab where the Luverne link can be found in the list of communities.

Lighted Christmas plans in Luverne City Park/continued from page 1A

and most creative display.

The Palace Theatre may be able to show the popular computer animated "Polar Express" movie that weekend, and community members are encouraged to decorate lighted displays in the park under the theme of trains.

On the night of Nov. 28, the park will open at 6 p.m. to let cars into the park to watch the fireworks, which will begin at 7 p.m.

"We're hoping we can get 100 cars in there. The south berm is the greatest place to see the fireworks," Lanphere said.

Each car will be charged \$10 to enter, and children will receive a treat and locomotive bell.

When Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive at the park, people in cars will be instructed to roll down their windows and ring their bells.

"They'll be told that if Santa hears the bells, the park will light up," Lanphere said.

"When the lights come on, those cars inside the park will get to circle the displays first, and then we'll open up the park to everyone."

Lanphere said the lighted park evening is a solid plan, regardless of pandemic shifts.

"This will totally be a fun thing to experience for families," she said.

"It's been another trying year for families and individuals, and if the pandemic flares up again,

we'll be safe. Everyone will be in their cars with their own families."

Timeline:

On Nov. 1 the park will open for decorating to start.

On Nov. 26 decorating will be done with all displays ready to be plugged in.

On Nov. 28 the community will celebrate the holiday kickoff at the park.

At 5 p.m. the train will arrive with Santa and Mrs. Claus at the holiday-decorated Luverne Depot on Freeman Street.

From 5 to 6:30 p.m. Santa and Mrs. Claus will pose for photos with children at the depot, where people can tour

the station.

At 6 p.m. the park will be open for cars to enter for viewing the fireworks.

At 6:30 p.m. the train will return Santa and Mrs. Claus to the city park for fireworks.

7 p.m. — Fireworks start

After fireworks are over, children will be instructed to ring their bells and the park displays will light up simultaneously.

To reserve a space at the park to decorate a holiday display, call the Chamber, 507-283-4061.

Lanphere said participants will get all the information they need about electrical hookups and other details when they sign up.

Rock Ranch in Hills joins Arenas for Change program/continued from page 1A

insightful ways horses can improve health and facilitate discussion within organizations like Rock Ranch that assist therapists with clients' personal growth.

The recent in-person EAP training showed four local mental health practitioners how combining horses and storytelling can be a useful tool in getting clients to discover and work through challenging areas in their lives.

Four Rock Ranch volunteers were also trained in horse selection and how to keep clients and therapists safe during the therapy sessions.

Not a horseback riding program, clients and their therapist safely watch from a distance as four to five horses interact freely in the arena or a pasture. The horses' natural herd behavior provides opportunities for stories to be discovered and told. And, over time, for healing to begin.

Clients are asked to make up stories from the

horses' behaviors, and this can open doors to discussing actual mental health issues. The trained therapists and certified equine specialists are there to help guide clients through the process.

"We believe our stories change," LaRock said. "And we change through working through those stories."

ARCH founder Lynn Thomas and co-facilitators Amanda Graham and Lynn Moore spent two days training Rock Ranch staff and local mental health professionals.

She said the technique offers clients an opportunity to step back, examine their stories and find deeper meaning and understanding to issues the clients need to overcome.

"Horses are the best story editors," Thomas said. "They have a way of bringing out stories in a deeper way."

As clients create stories from their observation of the horses, they begin to feel emotionally safe. "The

magic (of healing) begins," Thomas said.

Rock Ranch is one of 16 to join Arenas for Change, which formerly organized in July, after a year of planning.

The training is supported by various monetary gifts including the Southwest Initiative Foundation, Luverne Area Community Foundation and individual donors to Rock Ranch's education fund.

"If we are going to have talented people on our team, we feel it is important to provide training," said Dan LaRock, who began Rock Ranch in 2016 with Marie.

The Ranch allocates \$8,000 a year for EAP training that includes a

scholarship fund to help clients afford the cost of care.

Mental health practitioners completing the training at Rock Ranch include Natasha Kellenberger (LMFT), Lynne Hunter (MSW CSW-PIP), Carissa Palmberg (MS, LPC, LAC) and Jill Jonnes-Kuca (MC, MACL, FFT).

Equine specialists include Marie LaRock, Dolores Bundeson, Patti Swenson and Jessica Richters.

LaRock, Palmberg and Jonnes-Kuca are also Eagala certified.

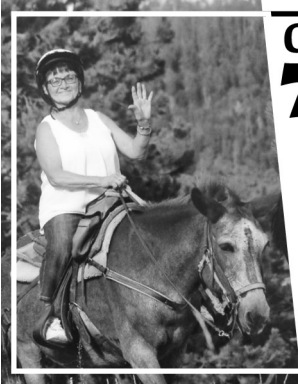
Staci Bundeson was recently hired as the Ranch's office and

operations manager, and Richters is the Ranch's barn manager and instructor.

In addition to EAP, Rock Ranch offers beginning riding lessons

and a senior saddle program.

For more information, visit the Ranch's website, www.riderockranch.org.



Guess who turns **75** on October 27th!
JOYCE HANSEN
Sara, her favorite mule, has passed on.

Birthday greetings can be sent to Box #197 Hardwick, MN 56134



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