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Your Community News & Information Source

March 2023

Two Rivers names new football coach

Tim Spitzack
Editor

Two Rivers High School has a new co-leader in its football program. The school recently hired Bruce Carpenter to serve as co-lead football coach. He will share duties with longtime head coach Tom Orth, a 34-year veteran of the program.

Carpenter brings a wealth of coaching experience to the school. He coached at the collegiate level for 16 years, with 11 years as a coordinator. For the past five years he was the offensive coordinator at the University of St. Thomas, which became a Division I program in 2021. In his 19 years of coaching, he has coached at every level, including high school, NAIA, Division 1, Division II and Division III. As a player, he was a captain and record-setting quarterback at Winona State University.

"Coach Orth has worked tirelessly for the students of School District 197, and I am excited to partner with him, adding my knowledge and experience to help the Warrior football program be a transformational opportunity for our young student-athletes," Carpenter said in a press release. "The game of football has the ability to affect entire communities in a positive way, and I look forward to helping create and sustain that mission."

Carpenter's immediate goals will focus on enhancing the program's culture and expectations, youth development and sustainability, and

Two Rivers / Page 2

Ward 2 annual meeting gives sneak peek at 2023 happenings

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

In mid-January, Ward 2 Councilmember Rebecca Noecker hosted the Ward 2 annual meeting, highlighting some accomplishments in the ward last year and offering a peek at developments in the pipeline this year. She was joined by representatives of city departments and community organizations, as well as a

roomful of citizens. Here are the highlights of the meeting.

Homelessness - The city's Department of Inspection Homeless Assistance Response Team (HART) now takes longer to find housing for people living in tents or encampments. When HART was created in fall 2021, it was able to provide temporary housing in hotel rooms for people experiencing homelessness, thanks

to American Rescue Plan Act funding from Ramsey County. That funding ended last June and now the team must do a deeper study of each case of homelessness to learn how to best help the unsheltered individual or individuals. Andrea Hinderaker, coordinator for the 3-person team, said that HART has found housing for 25 people previously living in encampments and is currently tracking 64 indi-

viduals across 34 sites. Citizens may call 651-266-8989 to report a person camping in their neighborhood or in a public area.

Housing - Construction of affordable housing continues to remain a priority, said Tara Beard, the city's housing director. Affordable housing is identified as costing 60% of the area median income – just over \$70,000 in St. Paul – and deeply affordable housing as 30% of

the area median income. In 2022, the city awarded American Rescue Plan Act funds to five projects that are creating a total of 110 deeply affordable units. This is a sharp increase compared to the 20 affordable units that were permitted citywide from 2019-2021. One of the five projects is in Ward 2 and will have 35 of the 110 units. Soul Apartments broke ground at Robert and Plato in November and is

expected to be completed in spring 2024.

In related news, a few guidelines have been altered to the city's downpayment assistance program and homeowner rehab programs. People can now receive more money through the programs, have quicker loan forgiveness options and have more choices for how to use the money. Applications to

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Local food shelves see record-high demand

Minnesota FoodShare campaign aims to help



A Neighborhood House volunteer helps a shopper at the food market.

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

Neighborhood House and Neighbors, Inc. are among the approximately 300 food shelves across Minnesota participating in the annual Minnesota FoodShare campaign, an initiative of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. Food shelves are competing to see which can raise the most food and money through April 9. The campaign offers an added boost because the Council of Churches will donate a proportionate amount of funds to each food shelf, based

on how much it raises.

While these organizations rely on donations throughout the year, they are especially needed this time of year as the nonprofits restock after the holidays and prepare for the busy summer months ahead.

Numbers show that the need for donations at food shelves in our readership area are at an all-time high.

Neighborhood House, 179 Robie St. E., St. Paul, operates the Wellstone Center Food Market, which serves residents

FoodShare / Page 2

WSPPD committed to mental health

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

Being a police officer can be a demanding job, both physically and emotionally. While the culture of the profession has been one of not speaking about the stresses of the job, that is changing, and the West St. Paul Police Department has seen first-hand how that shift has helped improve the lives of its officers.

Chief Brian Sturgeon said the department has been working with Ellie Mental Health since 2018 to give its officers two wellness consultations a year. The consultations aren't therapy sessions. Rather, they're an opportunity for officers to talk to a licensed therapist. If needed, an officer will be referred to formal counseling services. Each officer can choose from about 20 therapists across the state who are specifically trained to work with first responders. They also have the option of doing the wellness consultations virtually.

The Mendota Heights-based practice was founded by Erin Pash, who serves as CEO. She was formally introduced to the department while volunteering for three years with the West St. Paul/Mendota Heights Citizens Academy, an educational program that allows citizens to learn about issues facing law enforcement officers.

"We implemented a peer support group a couple years back and they've [Ellie Mental Health] been instrumental in helping us get policies and procedures in place for that

Ellie / Page 2



Bruce Carpenter and Tom Orth

Two Rivers

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helping student-athletes find success on and off the field.

"I am incredibly excited about the opportunity to lead the Warrior football family with Bruce," Orth said in the release. "Bruce's vast knowledge of the game and experience helping youth grow academically, athletically and emotionally will have a positive impact on our students and our program."

Carpenter works as a student support specialist at Two Rivers. His wife Jennifer is head coach of the Warrior softball program. Their three young children are involved in athletics and activities within the district.

The Two Rivers football team finished 3-8 last season and was runner up in the Section 3AAAAA Championship game.

Ellie

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program," said Sturgeon, who noted that several officers are now specifically trained in peer support. "We also utilize them if we have a critical incident where a group or individuals should be referred somewhere."

A big part of the work, Pash said, is breaking down the "tough guy" and "tough girl" stigma that's typically associated with first responders and making them feel comfortable in talking about issues they're facing, whether a traumatic on-the-job experience or something happening in their personal life. The West St. Paul Police Department was the first police department to work with Ellie Mental Health,

which now provides wellness consultations for 15 police departments.

"We have a program director who is extensively trained in working with law enforcement, and all of our therapists who work with law enforcement have to go through additional training to make sure they're competent in law enforcement and first responder issues," said Pash.

Pash founded Ellie Mental Health in 2015 and now operates 19 clinics in Minnesota and 31 across 14 other states. The organization is rapidly expanding and will have 280 clinics open by the end of this year, and more than 500 open by the end of 2024. Its mission is to desigmatize mental health issues and make mental health services more accessible for



Erin Pash founded Ellie Mental Health in 2015 and now operates 19 clinics in Minnesota and 31 across 14 other states.

all. Pash said the name of the organization is a reference to elephants, which are symbolic in mental health

for strength-based healing. For more information, visit elliementalhealth.com.

FoodShare

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of Ramsey County. Last fiscal year, the market distributed approximately 807,500 pounds of food to more than 11,300 families. Their goal for this campaign is to raise

200,000 pounds of food. Donations may be dropped off at the center at any time; those seeking to receive food must make an appointment prior to visiting the market.

To make an appointment, call 651-789-3630 between 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on weekdays. For more information, visit neighborhoodhousemn.org.

"We recently returned to in-person shopping and are currently using an appointment-based model, which we are evaluating and continuously working to stay on top of since we know the need is so high," said Becki Lonnquist, Neighborhood House commun-

cations specialist. "We still offer emergency to-go bags and monthly fresh produce events, where we hand out 3,700 pounds of produce to 100 people."

Neighbors, Inc., 222 Grand Ave., South St. Paul, serves residents in northern Dakota County. In the past year, its food shelf has seen about 2,000 visits per month, a significant increase compared to the 500 it saw during busy months in previous years. Last fiscal year, the nonprofit distributed more than 774,000 pounds of food to 17,600 families. The organization's goal during this campaign is to raise 350,000 pounds of food/money. Donations may be dropped off at the lower level of Neighbors Inc., from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday, and financial donations can be mailed to Neighbors, Inc. or given online at neighborsmn.org.

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The St. Paul Voice is published monthly and delivered to 16,500 homes and businesses in St. Paul's West Side, West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Lilydale & Sunfish Lake.

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ST. PAUL PUBLISHING COMPANY

1643 So. Robert St., West St. Paul, MN 55118

651-457-1177 | info@stpaulpublishing.com | www.stpaulpublishing.com

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Ward 2

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receive money through those programs is currently open.

Public Works

Some significant public works projects will be starting soon. For more information on these projects, visit [stpaul.gov](#) and search "downtown projects."

Construction of the Capital City Bikeway Trail on Kellogg Boulevard between St. Peter and Jackson streets will take place this summer. The segment from St. Peter to West 7th Street is slated for 2025.

Full reconstruction of Minnesota Street from Kellogg Boulevard to 6th Street will happen this summer. The leg from 6th to 11th streets will take place next summer.

Reconstruction of Annapolis Street will occur this summer in partnership with the City of West St. Paul. Work on Cruse Street that was delayed last year will also happen this summer.

Traffic signal improvements will be made to the intersection of Cesar Chavez,

State and George streets this summer, and sewer improvements will occur on Water Street and Plato Boulevard this summer and in 2024.

Reconstruction of two bridges may occur this summer if funding is secured. They are the Kellogg/3rd Street bridge, including Kellogg Boulevard from Broadway Street to Mounds Boulevard, and the eastbound Kellogg Boulevard bridge between West 7th and Market Streets, including the Exchange Street viaduct connecting Kellogg Boulevard to Eagle Street and the loading dock exit road below eastbound Kellogg Boulevard.

Police department

St. Paul Police Department Senior Commander Jesse Mollner said the police department is working closely with St. Paul Downtown Alliance, Ramsey County Sheriff's office, Met Council and other city departments to help restore order to areas of downtown that became problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, the police department has stationed additional officers in the area who cannot be called away from their posts.

Ward 2 has 66 officers, which is one-third of the police force, and 21 of those

groups to identify problem areas in downtown and ways to restore them. The work groups are composed of building owners, business owners and spokespeople for city departments and organizations. The top priority area is the tower of the Vertical Circulation Building at 5th and Cedar that connects the light rail Central Station to the skyway system. The building was closed in late December following two homicides there that month, and the police department is working with Met Council, which owns the building, to make security improvements so it can reopen in the spring. According to Mollner, hiring contracted security for the tower is preferred. Other improvements may include installing one-way glass windows so people in the skyway can't watch pedestrians on the street below, installing cameras and public announcement systems, and more.

In the meantime, the police department has stationed additional officers in the area who cannot be called away from their posts. Last year the library gave away 11,923 books as part of Summer Spark. The three libraries in Ward 2 are the George Latimer Central Library, Riverview Library and West 7th Library. For more information, visit [sppl.org](#).

officers are stationed downtown. The police department responded to about 93,000 service calls in Ward 2 last year.

Libraries

St. Paul Public Library Youth and Family Services Manager Kelsey Johnson-Kaiser announced the library's goal of giving away 16,000 free books during its Summer Spark program, held June through August. Youth ages 18 and under may register for the program at any of the library's 13 branches. Once registered, they will receive an activity log and a free book to keep. When participants finish their book they can get another to keep, and those who complete their reading goals will receive an award. The program also offers free activities throughout the year such as technology-focused pop-up programs and outdoor performances. Last year the library gave away 11,923 books as part of Summer Spark. The three libraries in Ward 2 are the George Latimer Central Library, Riverview Library and West 7th Library. For more information, visit [sppl.org](#).

Goals

Councilperson Noecker said some of her primary goals for Ward 2 this year are to raise support for affordable housing and affordable childcare, safe gun storage laws, and to receive as much funding as possible from the state legislature.

Ward 2 includes the West Side, West 7th Street, Summit Hill, Railroad Island and Lowertown neighborhoods, and the Downtown business district. To stay up to date on what's happening in Ward 2, visit [www.stpaul.gov](#) and search "Noecker."

St. Matthew's 34th Annual Dine-in & Curbside-to-go



Every Friday Feb. 24-April 7

Serving Time: 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Baked and/or fried fish, baked potato, vegetable, cole slaw, roll and brownie. Grilled cheese or spaghetti available as non-fish option.

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Enter social hall entrance at the rear of the church.

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For more information, visit [st-matts.org](#)

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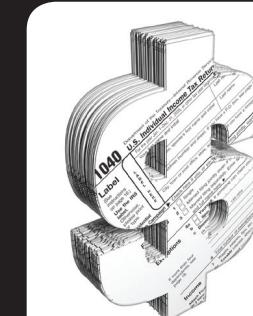
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'Read Brave'

St. Paul Public Library is celebrating the 10th year of "Read Brave," a citywide, intergenerational reading initiative aimed at sparking conversation and new ideas. This year's theme focuses on mental health. Now through March 15, residents of all ages are invited to read one of the featured titles.

- Young Adult Fiction: "Darius the Great" is Not

"Okay" by Adib Khorram

- Adult Nonfiction: "My Grandmother's Hands" by Resmaa Menakem (local author)

- Middle Reader (graphic novel): "Living with Viola" by Rosena Fung

- Early Reader: "My Footprints" by Bao Phi (local author)

- Picture Book: "The Rabbit Listened" by Cori Doerfler (local author)

The library distributed more than 5,000 copies of the titles to classrooms and community groups throughout the city. The books are also available for check-out at St. Paul public libraries, including e-book and audio-book copies.

The library will host free events March 1-15, including book discussions, healing workshops, a storytime, and a community volunteering event. For more information, visit ReadBrave.org.

Volunteers needed

DARTS has recently launched a new program to bridge the technology gap for seniors. The nonprofit's new Tech Buddies program pairs volunteers with older adults to provide technology assistance with laptops, smart phones, tablets, smart TVs and other devices. DARTS is seeking participants and volunteers for the program. For more information, contact DARTS at info@darts1.org or call 651-455-1560. Volunteers are also needed to shovel snow from the driveways and walks of older adults in the community.

'The Wild Rumpus' ballet

Ballet Co.Laboratory is presenting The Wild Rumpus March 11-12 at Park Square Theatre, 20 W. 7th Place, St. Paul. The performance is inspired by author Maurice Sendak's popular children's book, "Where The Wild Things Are." This original ballet was created by Hannah MacKenzie-Margulies, Ballet Co.Laboratory's 2023 Laboratory II emerging choreographer. Tickets start at \$25 and are available at balletcolaboratory.org/season or by calling 651-313-5967.

Matching gift for new pool at STA and Vis

St. Thomas Academy and Visitation School recently received a \$3 million matching gift to help fund a new aquatic center shared by the two schools. The matching gift, received from Academy alumnus Chip Michel (class of 1967) and his wife Mary, is meant to encourage other donors to contribute toward the remaining \$3 million needed for the \$10 million

project. The Michel family previously pledged \$1 million to the project. Their total \$4 million gift represents the largest gift in the history of both schools.

As a cadet, Michel was a member of the swim and dive team for four years and was team captain his senior year. Today, he serves as co-chair of the capital campaign for the new aquatic center, to be located on the St. Thomas Academy campus. The center will include a 25-yard pool with eight lanes, diving board, bleacher seating for 300 and expanded deck space. It is expected to be open for the 2025-26 swim season. In addition to being the training and competition home for the Cadets and the Blazers, the new aquatic center will serve local swim clubs and Catholic Athletic Association schools. The current pool, built in the 1960s, has just five lanes and does not meet today's minimum depth requirements for diving competitions.

St. W., West St. Paul. The event features group games, sports, arts and crafts, and more for ages 6-12.

Author reading

The Minnesota Historical Society will host a reading by West St. Paul Author Michael Orange, 1-2 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 11, at Historic Fort Snelling. He will discuss his latest book, "Embracing the Ghosts: PTSD and the Vietnam Quagmire." For more details, visit mnhs.org/fortsnelling/.

New hire

West Side-based Mahoney CPA recently hired Kevin Wold as director of human resources. Wold previously worked at WSB Associates for 16 years.

Student Notes

Rochester Community and Technical College dean's list: Edward Michaels

College of the Holy Cross dean's list: Cecilia Baillon, Aidan McSweeney

Iowa State University dean's list: Dain Dolan, Luke Mayer

University of Vermont dean's list: William Hamilton, Annika Overvig

University of Minnesota Duluth dean's list: Abigail Gotham, Bridget Kelly, Miles Drugge, Camilla Millett, Jacob Stecher, Riley Altier, Jacob Boehm, Justin Ciletti, Clare Fleming, Cole Jacobs, Serena Nelson

Benedictine College: dean's list - Mary Katherine Kocourek, Thomas Richter, Kathryn Schneider, Joann Stodolka, Thomas Stokman, John Paul DeReuil, Ellen Menke, Timothy Rosno, Julian Stokman. President's list - Elizabeth Hall, Paul Wilkin, Mary Menke. Kathryn Schneider earned a bachelor's in civil engineering, magna

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cum laude.

Wisconsin Lutheran College: Ziyi Wu earned a bachelor's in nursing.

University of Wisconsin-River Falls graduates: Mitchell Brist, bachelor's in history; Mary Fallon, bachelor's in elementary education

Worcester Polytechnic Institute dean's list: John Hall

College of St. Scholastica: Dave Griffiths earned a bachelor's in nursing

Gustavus Adolphus College dean's list: Brooke Foley, Thomas McDermott, Abigail Ludwig, Mugisho Ntibonera, Greta Wold

South Central College president's list: Sarah Roberge

Hamline University

dean's list: Hannah Brauer, Jasmine Morales, Ruben Augustin Quevedo, Ari Newfield, Daniela Sanchez-Castillo, Edward Cina, Hugh Fleming, Madyn Dupaul, Quincy Lewis, Nick Tonn, Jacob Vetsch and Tree Reisdorf Wong

Minnesota State University Mankato: honor list - Charles Groebner, Tyneisha

Stowers, Brian Moua; high honor list - Janessa Mulder, Margaret Schmid, Sophia Schmid

St. Mary's University dean's list: Aryn Marable, Justine Cobbett, Isabella Griffin, Amanda Tuvey, Cecilia Flores

St. Olaf College dean's list: Oslo Risch, Jaelyn Orth, Allie Prokosch

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse dean's list: Ellie Quehl, Olivia Tomasetti, Anahi Ibarra

St. Cloud State University: Andrew Smith earned a bachelor of science in real estate

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire: graduates - Hailey Anderson earned a bachelor of arts in art;

Joaquin Nafstad earned a bachelor of business administration, information systems. Dean's list - Katie Schlinger, Julia Thompson, Holly Ball, Nicholas Ball, Luca Ciletti, Benjamin Kirkwood, Daniel Rundquist

Purchase College dean's list: AnAva Dubeaux

Students taking charge

Leadership groups at Two Rivers see surge in membership

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

When Two Rivers school counselor Leah Erchul began her role as advisor to the student council five years ago, there were about 35 students on the council. Today it has ballooned to 90 members, a record high. About 20 students from grades 9-11 joined this year alone. She attributes this spike in membership to students' desire to continue reconnecting with and supporting their peers following the struggles of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When we came back in the fall of 2021, the student council really kicked off with the theme of uniting and inclusion," said Erchul. "It was through this mindset that we hosted many events that supported the variety of students that we have, from athletes, to actors, to musicians, to gamers and to our more quiet students. Some of these events were mini-sport tournaments, trivia, movie nights, and Olympic events. We also made more

opportunities to involve staff members in the events and overall created more unity."

The student council meets weekly to discuss issues affecting students and find ways to solve them. For example, in recent years they have worked to remove the financial barrier to go to prom by finding affordable places for dress and tuxedo rentals. Working alongside faculty, they also plan spirit-building events such as homecoming and prom, and other activities that enhance the social and academic lives of students. Leading the council are a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, publicity chair and class ambassadors. Each is required to have at least one year of experience on the council before being eligible to be elected by their peers.

Another student-led leadership group is the Warrior Leadership Team, which has 20 members. It formed about five years ago as the District Student Leadership Team but was paused during the pandemic. Last

school year, ISD 197 Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog asked Two Rivers Principal Al Johnson if he was willing to reestablish the team and become its advisor. He happily accepted and gave it a new name. The team now gathers monthly to discuss creative ways to make the school welcoming for all students. They also meet quarterly with Olson-Skog to relay student concerns and desires for their school and the school district.

"What is being created here at Two Rivers," said Johnson, "is the ability for students to have a voice, and now they're starting to exercise that voice. These pro-social activities let them come in and help create change. We're trying to normalize that here."

Last year, Johnson hand-picked 15 students to be on the team. Some were also on the student council. The group met at least once a month to revisit the group's purpose and goals. This school year, Johnson opened membership to the entire school but required students to fill out an application stat-



The Warrior Leadership Team at the World Café conference that was hosted by the MSHSL at Park Center Senior High School in January.

ing why they wanted to be part of the group. He said the team now has members from every grade and from many different extracurricular backgrounds, including drama, debate and athletics. The group is led by two co-presidents and two secretaries.

"What bubbled up was that some true leaders emerged and stated, 'I want

to be a part of this group,'" said Johnson. "There's no limit [to membership numbers]. The students have to be leaders academically and socially. We want them to represent what being morally strong looks like as they're in the halls and the classroom."

This year, the team established groups to play games with new students whose primary language isn't Eng-

lish to help the new students build their English language skills and to make connections with other students. Members of the team also attended a student-led conference hosted by the Minnesota State High School League to discuss how to prevent racism, bullying and harassment in sports. In May, the team will host a health and wellness fair.

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Twin Cities Ballet presents Pink Floyd's "The Wall: A Rock Ballet," 7:30 p.m., March 3-5. Tickets start at \$37.50.

History Center

345 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-259-3000
mnhs.org

Sherlock Holmes: The Exhibition is featured through April 2. Visitors can learn about areas of forensic science and engage in interactive crime-solving exercises. Original manuscripts, period artifacts, and investigative tools influenced and used by Sherlock Holmes are on view.

Our Home: Native Minnesota includes historic and contemporary photographs, maps and artifacts. Visitors learn how Minnesota's native communities have retained cultural practices, teachings and values.

Other exhibits include Minnesota's Greatest Generation, Then Now Wow, Grainland and Weather Permitting. The Center is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Thurs.-Sun. Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and college students, and \$8 for children ages five to 17.

History Theatre

30 E. 10th St.
St. Paul
651-292-4323

Historytheatre.com

"**Diesel Heart**" is presented on select days March 11-April 2. Inspired by Melvin Carter Jr.'s book "Diesel Heart," the play follows

Carter Jr. through the 1950s and '60s as he grew up in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood. Tickets start at \$43 for adults, \$38 for seniors, \$30 for adults under age 30 and \$15 for students.

Landmark Center

75 5th St. W.
St. Paul
651-292-3225

landmarkcenter.org

Urban Expedition Nigeria, 1-3 p.m., Sunday, March 12. Learn about Nigerian culture through music, dance and crafts. Free.

Ballet Tuesday, noon-1 p.m., Tuesday, Mar. 14. Dancers from Ballet Co.Laboratory will perform excerpts from the company repertoire.

St. Patrick's Day Irish Celebration, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Friday, Mar. 17. Produced by Irish Arts Minnesota, the event features



NICKOLAS LARSON

Omnifest returns to the Science Museum of Minnesota March 3-April 9. It features four Omnitheater films: "National Parks Adventure," "Born to be Wild," "Superpower Dogs" and "Amazon Adventure."

Celtic music, dancing and food vendors. \$7-9.

Sunday at Landmark:

An Irish Day of Dance, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 19. Enjoy Celtic music, dancing and food vendors. The event is produced by the Irish Music and Dance Association. \$7-9.

MN Children's Museum

10 7th St. W.
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651-225-6000
mcm.org

Framed: Step into Art is featured through May 7. Step into the 3D world of four well-known paintings, view famous prints and par-

odies of the Mona Lisa, and replace Mona Lisa's face with your own.

Other exhibits and activities include The Scramble, The Studio, Creativity Jam, Sprouts, Our World, Forces at Play, Sprouts, Shipwreck Adventures and Imaginopolis.

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MN Museum of American Art

350 Robert St. N.
St. Paul
651-797-2571
mmaa.org

"Colonial Traumas," is an installation in Skyway 28 over Wabasha Street at 4th Street in downtown St. Paul. Created by Luis Fitch, the mural features colorful, vinyl cut-out skulls that represent the complexity of identity, place, and belonging for people of mixed-race descent.

"It's Okay to Laugh" is an installation in the skyway windows above Robert Street. Created by Jose Dominguez, it features colorful vinyl creatures that "play" hide and seek with passersby.

"Off the Deep End," a digital mural printed on vinyl, is on display in the Jackson Street skyway bridge between 4th and 5th Streets through March 15. The artwork was created by 19 students from the St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists and explores the theme of metaphorical rising sea level.

Im/perfect Slumbers is on display through August

20, in the M's window galleries and skyway entrance. Guest curated by M artist-in-residence Katya Oicherterman in collaboration with Curator of Exhibitions Laura Joseph, this multidisciplinary series of installations captures the historical and contemporary state of sleeping and being in bed.

Ordway Center
345 Washington St.
St. Paul
651-224-4222
ordway.org

St. Paul Chamber Orchestra concerts: "Family Concert: E Gol!," 10 and 11:30 a.m., Saturday, Mar. 4 (free); Brahms and Bartok with Tabea Zimmermann, 8 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 11 and 2 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 12 (tickets start at \$12); Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony with Tabea Zimmermann, 8 p.m., March 17-18 (tickets start at \$12); Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 with Richard Egarr, March 31-April 2 (tickets start at \$12).

"My Fair Lady," March 21-25. Tickets start at \$44.

The Red Hot Chili Pipers, 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 25. Tickets start at \$49.

Palace Theatre
17 7th Place W.
St. Paul
612-338-8388
first-avenue.com

Bobby Weir and Wolf Bros., 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Mar. 1. Tickets start at \$60.

Park Square Theatre

20 W. 7th Place
St. Paul
651-291-7005
parksquaretheatre.org

"The Revolutionists" is presented March 29-April 16. Four women, including an assassin, a spy, a playwright and Marie Antoinette, find themselves caught up in the French Revolution in this rebellious comedic romp that considers how to go about changing the world.

RiverCentre
175 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-265-4800
rivercentre.org

Let's Play Hockey Expo, March 10-11. Shop from dozens of hockey-related vendors. \$5 for ages 19 and older; free for those age 18 and under.

Minnesota Roller Derby, 7 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 11. Tickets start at \$12.50.

34th Annual Donnie Smith Bike Show, March 25-26. Tickets are \$15 for adults and free for children age 12 and under.

Schubert Club
302 Landmark Center
75 W. 5th St.
St. Paul
651-292-3268
schubert.org

Courtroom Concerts are held on Thursdays at noon at the Landmark Center. All are free. Upcoming concerts include MN Opera, March 2; Juan Carlos Mendoza (tenor) and Diane Van Den

Oever (piano), March 9; and Carrie Shaw (soprano) and Andrew Romanick (piano), March 23.

KidsJam: Journey through Afro-Brazilian music with Ticket to Brasil, 10:30 a.m., Friday, Mar. 3 at the club's music museum. Learn about Brazilian music and create your own percussion instrument. \$5 for children; free for accompanying adults.

Randall Goosby (violin) and **Anna Han** (piano) will perform at 4 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 12, at St. Anthony Park United Church of Christ as part of the Music in the Park Series. Tickets start at \$23.

Benjamin Beilman (violin) and **Yekwon Sunwoo** (piano) will perform at 10:30 a.m., Friday, Mar. 17 and 3 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 19, at the Ordway Concert Hall. Tickets start at \$28.

Museum Mini: Nirmala Rajasekar (veena), 10:30 a.m., Monday, Mar. 20, online on the Schubert Club website. Learn about veena, the oldest Indian instrument, in this free 15-minute interactive session.

Virtual Concert: Bridget Kibbey (harp) and **Alexi Kenney** (violin), 7:30 p.m., March 24-31. Tickets are \$10.

Science Museum of Minnesota
120 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-221-9444
smm.org

New Science is a temporary exhibit on display through March 25. De-

signed by the California Academy of Sciences, this exhibit highlights LGBTQ+ workers in the STEMM (science, technology, engineering, math and medicine) industry.

Exquisite Creatures is on display through September 4. Explore the planet's biodiversity by viewing preserved animal specimens arranged in intricate patterns.

Omnitheater films - "Sea Lions: Life by a Whisker," through April 9. Connect with some of nature's most unusual, curious and playful animals in this quest to save one of the world's endangered species.

Omnifest is held March 3-April 9 and features four Omnitheater films including: "National Parks Adventure," "Born to be Wild," "Superpower Dogs" and "Amazon Adventure."

Stellar Tours Live Digital Telescope Show, 2 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays. Choose your own space adventure and experience the Omnitheater's new Digistar 7 projection system. Omnitheater tickets are \$9.95. Free for children age 3 and under.

Sensory Friendly Sunday is hosted the first Sunday of

the month. Visitors can experience a lights-up, sound-down Omnitheater show at 10 a.m. The program was created in consultation with the Autism Society of Minnesota. Admission is free for personal care attendants when visiting with a client.

Museum tickets range from \$9.95-\$34.90, with discounts available for those with limited incomes.

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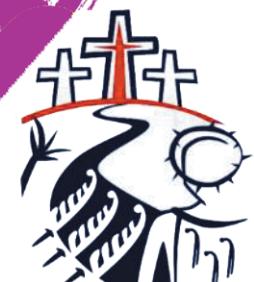
Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band, 7:30 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 5. Tickets start at \$225.

NCHC Fan Skate, 7-8:30 p.m., Thursday, Mar. 16. Bring your own skates. Free.

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Otter sightings along the Mississippi River

Tim Spitzack
Editor

The North American river otter is one of nature's most playful mammals to observe. Watching them slide down a slippery riverbank or slope of snow, twist and turn as they glide effortlessly through the water, or frolic about in tall prairie grasses leads one to believe they don't have a care in the world. They act as if the world is their oyster.

I've spent countless hours over the past two decades traipsing through the U.S. National Park Service's Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) in the metro area and paddling the river but it wasn't until late summer 2021 that I got my first glimpse of this happy-go-lucky creature. It was a glorious day in mid-September, with warm sunshine and a cool, gentle breeze. I was kayaking around Lower Grey Cloud Island when I saw movement in the distance. At first, I thought a carp had surfaced, a common occurrence in the area. Then I noticed a brown head weaving through the water. I got

excited, thinking it might be a beaver. Then another head appeared, and another. As the scene came into sharp focus, I suddenly realized I was witnessing a family of river otters: five in all. I stopped paddling and drifted along breathlessly, hoping not to disturb them as I enjoyed the show. The otters seemed not to mind my presence as long as I kept my distance. One barked and I snickered and nodded my head to return the greeting. One surfaced with a small fish in its long-whiskered mouth and casually munched away. The others simply swam around, bobbing up and down in an ever-constant circle of activity. Perhaps each was looking for a meal, but if that was the case, they were in no hurry to find it.

The waters around Grey Cloud Island are pocked with other small islands filled with sedges and willows, giving it a very coastal, isolated feel. Large fields of lily pads gently sway with the undulation of the river. The otters were swimming about 50 yards from one patch of lily pads and I watched as they casually made their way toward them. One by

one, they slowly disappeared into them and suddenly the show was over. Awestruck by what I had just witnessed, I found I was unable to continue paddling. It wasn't until I kicked myself for leaving my cellphone (aka camera) in the car that I was able to put my blade in the water. At that point I was filled with regret over not capturing the scene. Now, in retrospect, I'm glad I didn't. I'm sure the photo wouldn't have done justice to the memory that remains vivid in my mind.

Metro area otter survey

One hundred years ago, North American river otters (*Lontra canadensis*) were nearly extinct in the Upper Mississippi River Basin due to trapping, pollution and habitat loss. Improvements in water quality of the Mississippi River over the past 40 years have helped the otter population rebound. The National Park Service monitors otters within the MNRRA – a 72-mile corridor in the Twin Cities – to better understand population numbers and how otters interact with other wildlife and human devel-



iStock photo – because the author left his camera in his car

opment. Biologists and a cadre of volunteer naturalists regularly look for otter scat, tracks and other signs along shorelines. The monitoring began in 2009 and today more than 325 observations have been recorded on iNaturalist.org. Remote cameras are also placed throughout MNRRA to monitor otter activity. Photos and video can be found at www.nps.gov/miss/learn/nature/animals.htm.

They show otters frolicking with each other, imprints of their tracks, and long smooth grooves that the long-bodied, short-legged mammals make in the mud and snow.

River otters breed in late winter and early spring and give birth to one to three

pups. They are born blind and helpless, and it takes about two months until they learn to swim. Otters thrive on aquatic food and habitat. Their short legs, webbed feet and long tail make them strong swimmers, and their thick dark brown fur keeps them warm while swimming in cold water. Their life span is eight to nine years.

If you're walking along the river this spring, keep an eye out for these delightful critters, or signs of their existence. And if you spot any, be sure to register your finding at iNaturalist.org. The Minnesota Metro Otter Survey is a collaboration between MNRRA and the Minnesota Wildlife Tracking Project.

Fun facts

- Otters can close their nostrils during long dives and stay underwater for up to eight minutes.
- On land, a river otter can run at speeds of up to 15 mph.
- They grow to 3-4 feet in length and weigh between 11 and 30 pounds. The tail makes up about a third of their total length.
- They make dens in abandoned burrows or empty hollows, with underwater entrances.
- They have a very high metabolism and need to eat frequently, consuming fish, clams, frogs, mice, turtles and aquatic plants.

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Neighbors, Inc.

Get to know Neighbors: hunger relief program

By Heidi Satre

Since its inception in 1972, Neighbors has

constantly evolved to meet the needs of the community we serve. During our 50-year history, there have been periods of time with significant growth and change, including the past several years. We want to take the time to re-introduce you to Neighbors. We think you'll find that even though adaptations have been made to how we do things, our mission to serve our neighbors in need remains the same.

The first service we want to highlight is our hunger relief program. The food

shelf is probably our most well-known service, but the way we distribute food has evolved. In fact, we now offer four ways to access food from our food shelf: in-person shopping, curbside pick-up, food delivery and attending a distribution event.

In-person shopping involves scheduling an appointment to come in and shop for food, just like you would at a grocery store. This is our most popular option. Shoppers choose from a variety of products in different categories, including shelf-

stable items as well as dairy, meat and fresh produce.

Curbside pick-up is similar to in-person shopping, however, one of our volunteers packs the food (based on client preferences) and brings it out to a waiting vehicle.

Food delivery is an option we offer to individuals and families who have a transportation barrier. Volunteers pack and deliver these food orders.

Our newest option is food distribution events, the only option that doesn't require

an appointment. We hold these events at our food shelf every Thursday afternoon from 2:30-3:30 p.m. and the third Saturday of each month from 10-11:30 a.m. Food distributions are available to anyone in our community experiencing need. Neighbors has also embarked on partnerships with six local housing complexes, where we have satellite food shelves and distributions.

Offering many ways for people to access healthy food has enabled Neighbors to serve more people

in our community, which is important because the need for food assistance has increased significantly. During pre-pandemic months, Neighbors provided food to an average of 500 families each month. That number is now close to 2,000 households each month.

If you are interested in finding out more about our services, supporting the food shelf by volunteering or donating, or learning more about Neighbors, visit www.neighborsmn.org.

POSTSCRIPT

Complimenting Strangers

"I have to say, that is a very nice hat!" I told the man as he passed me on the sidewalk.

The man in the snazzy blue fedora had a serious look on his face, as if he was thinking deeply about something far more important than the indigo-blue hat with the red feather sitting on his head.

But whatever less-than-cheerful thought had been preoccupying him (the gathering clouds? The declining stock market? His expanding waistline?), it was whisked away when I complimented his dapper blue hat, and his face broke into a genuine smile.



Carrie Classon
CarrieClasson.com

I know people who say you shouldn't compliment strangers.

"It is intrusive," they say. "It's fake." Nobody wants a stranger commenting on their appearance."

I think this is a load of nonsense.

Everyone likes a compli-

ment. I think it means even more coming from a stranger. I don't interrupt conversations to compliment someone. I don't make things up or compliment something I don't genuinely admire. I don't think anyone has ever looked offended when I told them they looked good or something they were wearing was attractive.

I find myself complimenting strangers several times every day. I try to pay attention when I'm on my walks. I try to savor whatever is interesting or beautiful and, much of the time, this is either dogs (because dogs are always interesting and beautiful), or people. I have also complimented gardens, but the people responsible are rarely around to get these compliments. The nice thing about complimenting clothing is that the person associated with it is right there,

ready to receive the positive feedback.

"Thank you!" the man in the fedora said.

I'm sure he knew it was a good-looking hat. It looked expensive but I haven't bought enough hats to know. Even if someone has paid a lot for something – or perhaps especially if they have – they like to know that it was money well spent, that they look good and that someone has noticed. So I try to notice.

I've complimented older women on their coats and scarves, young women on the color of their hair (especially if it is blue or green), and tough-looking men on their clever T-shirts. It's always surprising how the people who look the most withdrawn are usually the ones who seem the most pleased. The young man may have forgotten what T-shirt

he put on that day but he's pleased to know it met with an appreciative audience – even if that audience was the slightly odd, cheerful older woman.

"Thanks!" he'll say, looking both a little embarrassed and absurdly pleased.

It doesn't matter if it's odd, I've learned. It doesn't matter where the comment comes from. We all want to be seen and to know that we don't walk invisible in this world. No one wants to feel alone in a crowd. Compliments may seem trivial or superficial, but sometimes they're the easiest way to throw a line to someone and say, "I see you! Seeing you makes me happy." It costs nothing and I think it can be more important than we will ever know.

The man in the blue hat had a little more bounce in his step as he walked past

me. I have no illusions that I changed his day significantly. But that's not my job. My job is to be more like that little bird who sings the same song, day after day, and makes the world just the smallest bit sweeter.

Till next time.

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TPAC events

Unless noted, all activities take place at Thompson Park Activity Center, 1200 Stassen Lane, West St. Paul. To register, call 651-403-8300.

The Dollys will perform 1-2 p.m., Wednesday, Mar. 22. \$10, includes dessert. Register by March 16.

Book Discussion, 9:30-

10:30 a.m., first four Thursdays in March. The title is "Swede Hollow" by Ola Larsmo. \$5 for four sessions. Books not provided.

Nature Sense with Eloise Dietz: exploring the color green, 2:15-3:30 p.m., Tuesday, Mar. 7. \$12.

Where Should I Get My Hearing Aids?, 10-11 a.m.,

Wednesday, Mar. 1.

You Have a Story – Yes You Do!, 10:30 a.m.-noon, the first four Wednesdays in March. Learn how to pinpoint your own personal stories and craft them so that they are clear, concise and compelling. \$60 for four sessions.

Help! I Need Sleep, 9:30-11 a.m., Monday, Mar. 6. Learn how snoring, obstructive sleep apnea, fatigue, headaches and weight gain affect your sleep. \$3.

Women Around the Globe: Ishwari Rajak, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Tuesday, Mar. 21. Author and activi-

st Ishwari Rajak will discuss cultural taboos, customs and beliefs surrounding menstruation, and share her reflections on situations and policies in America. \$5.

How We Built Britain, a presentation on Scottish castles and manor homes, 1:30-3:30, Tuesday Mar. 14.

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Spring Home Transformations



Whether you are planning to add a fence or deck to your backyard or are looking to do an extensive remodel, this guide will help save you time, money and headaches on your project. The tips are provided by the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry

Research - Taking time to research projects on the internet and nari.org will provide a good sense of what is involved regarding cost, scope of work, return on investment and material options. You should also research property values in your neighborhood to make

sure your project is in line with other homes in the area.

Long-term plan - To ensure your project is worth the investment, consider how long you will stay in your home and how your neighborhood and family structure might change over time.

Set your budget - Deciding on a realistic budget and arranging finances to support your project are essential. Share your budget with your remodeler.

Finding professionals - Ask friends, family and

spend time researching the recommended individuals or companies online. Professional remodelers take their reputation seriously and hold credentials beyond licensing, such as certifications, memberships in trade associations and additional training. Check online reviews and social media to see how they interacted with past clients and peers.

Ask the right questions - Ask your professional remodeler about their educational background, training, experience, specialties or past issues with clients, and how the remodeling process will work.

Verify your remodeler - Check the information you receive, including references, license numbers, insurance information and certifications by calling providers to verify. If you are undertaking

a large project, you might want to request a visit to an active client's jobsite and talk to the homeowner.

Review contracts word by word - A remodeling contract protects you and your remodeler. Homeowners should review contracts carefully and ask questions about terms or items they don't understand. Pay attention to details about change orders, payment, additional fees, timeline and responsibilities. If it's not in the contract, it doesn't exist.

Keep design in mind - Your design guides the entire project. Think about what you dislike about your current space and the intended use of the new space. Use websites such as Pinterest.com and Houzz.com to gather design ideas.

Make your selections - Deciding on products and materials is a larger process than most imagine. With so many options to choose from, product selections are one of the primary reasons that project timelines get extended. Base decisions on quality, function, price, style and availability. Include selections in the contract to lock down pricing and keep your budget intact.

Create a communication plan - A common downfall in remodeling is lack of communication between homeowners and remodelers. Your remodeler should lay out a communication plan at the beginning of the project. If not, ask them to do so. This plan should clarify roles of everyone involved, communication methods, availability, and frequency of communication that is expected.

Finding the right remodeler

The first step in hiring a contractor is to find one best

suit to your project. Start by searching the National Association of the Remodeling Industry at nari.org, where you can search by specialty, and zip code. You can also research names and background of qualified remodelers that may have been supplied by neighbors and friends to verify licensing and certifications. Here are the most common types of contractors:

Design-Build - A design-build firm offers quality design and construction services within the same general company. Because a design-build contractor understands job costs as well as design concepts, the entire process is engineered to fit your budget and vision right from the beginning.

Remodeling - Many home improvements do not require professional design services. Projects like porch construction, roofing, siding and window replacement can be handled successfully by experienced professional contractors with an intimate knowledge of materials and methods.

Architect/Designer - Major remodeling projects require construction drawings for defining a contract and procuring permits. In cases where your professional remodeler does not provide design services, you may wish to seek the assistance of a professional architect, preferably one with extensive remodeling experience.

Interior Designer - Interior design consultants are trained to deal with more than the furnishings and finishes that go into a space and make it look wonderful. They help you to see the big picture (form and function) as well as balance your aspirations, functional needs and budget.

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Joe Atkins
Dakota County Commissioner

A deeper look at county projects

In my January column, I wrote about the many services Dakota County provides, including public safety protection, Dakota911 emergency response, felony prosecution, county road construction and maintenance, crisis services, parks, trails and libraries. In February, I discussed how these services are funded while maintaining the lowest county taxes per person in Minnesota and being one of the only debt-free counties in the nation. Here, I'll begin a deeper dive, describing specific county projects and activities, particularly those happening here in northern Dakota County.

Mental Health Center - Spurred on by a unanimous vote of the West St. Paul City Council in December, Dakota County and Guild Services are taking the next steps to relocate and expand an existing mental health facility. Set to be constructed next to Dakota County's Northern Service Center on Mendota Road, the new 16-bed facility would replace three aging homes in South St. Paul that are no longer practical for this use.

The new 16,000-square-foot facility is expected to fill a gap in mental health services, allowing people in crisis to remain in their community for treatment rather than ending up in emergency rooms or hospital wards. In addition to providing a place for mental health assessments, this new facility will provide two treatment options: a crisis service for short-term care up to 10 days, as well as intensive treatment for up to 90 days. While some neighbors voiced concerns at the December city council meeting, most expressed support for the proposed facility. The next step is lining up funding. A \$5 million state grant has been secured but addi-

tional funding is needed to move the project forward. Potential sources are being identified.

Thompson and Oakdale

- Dakota County is working with the City of West St. Paul to address traffic and safety issues along Thompson Avenue. The project, planned for this year, proposes to resurface Thompson from Robert Street to Highway 52, and Oakdale from Wentworth to Butler, and replace the all-way stop controlled intersection at Thompson and Oakdale with a single-lane roundabout. Sidewalk and trail improvements are also planned.

Free radon tests

- Dakota County is providing free radon test kits to residents. Dangerous, cancer-causing levels of naturally occurring radon gas can be found in about 40% of Dakota County homes but the risk is largely preventable. Testing is easy, inexpensive and only takes 3-7 days for a short-term test. Test results will be mailed to residents with recommendations provided if a home test indicates high levels of radon. Phone consultations with Dakota County Public Health staff are also available. It is best to

test during colder months, so time is of the essence as spring approaches. Dakota County offers one radon test kit per visit for Dakota County residents at no cost at the Northern Service Center, 1 Mendota Road W., West St. Paul (fourth floor).

Online predators beware

- Dakota County's outstanding Electronic Crimes Unit (ECU) is about to get even better. Our sheriff's office secured a highly competitive federal grant to bring additional tools to the ECU that help prosecute criminals who use technology to victimize the vulnerable, the elderly and children. Thank you to our federal delegation for their help in securing this public safety funding.

Dakota County History Museum is open

- Our newly renovated history museum re-

cently reopened in South St. Paul. Now much more accessible, visitors can enjoy several new and engaging exhibits as well as better research and meeting areas. The museum is free, though donations and memberships are always appreciated. This was the museum's first major renovation since it opened in 1978.

New county library in South St. Paul

- Dakota County's new South St. Paul Library is making terrific progress and is expected to be open by this time next year.

Fix-It Clinics

- This month Dakota County celebrates five years of hosting Fix-It Clinics, helping thousands of residents learn repair skills, fix their broken household items and avoid throwing items in the trash. Since 2017, more than

2,000 residents have visited a monthly Fix-It Clinic, which are typically held at Dakota County libraries. Participants are matched with knowledgeable volunteers who fix household goods and clothing. The fixers successfully repair nearly 3 out of 4 items brought to the events. All that hard work and troubleshooting has kept 15,000 pounds of materials from landfills. Participants leave not only with a repaired item but knowledge of how they might fix something in the future.

Next month we'll take a look ahead at more county projects set for 2023 and a look back at a surprising bit of local history. I welcome your feedback. You can reach me at Joe.Atkins@co.dakota.mn.us or 651-438-4430.

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augustana.com

Beth Jacob Congregation
1179 Victoria Curve
Mendota Heights
651-452-2226
beth-jacob.org

Cherokee Park United
371 Baker St. W.
St. Paul
651-227-4275
cherokeeparkunited.org

**Community Christ
the Redeemer**
110 Crusader Ave. W.
West St. Paul
651-451-6123
ccredeemer.org

**Crown of Life Lutheran
Church & School**
115 Crusader Avenue W.
West St. Paul
651-451-3832
colwsp.org

Faith United Methodist
1530 Oakdale Ave.
West St. Paul
651-457-5686
faithumcmn.com

Holy Family Maronite
1960 Lexington Ave. S.
Mendota Heights
651-291-1116
HolyFamilyEvents.org

La Puerta Abierta UMC
690 Livingston Ave.
St. Paul
651-558-1896

Mizpah River Ministries
1530 Oakdale Ave.
West St. Paul
651-399-5783

Our Lady of Guadalupe
401 Concord St., St. Paul
651-228-0506
www.olgcatholic.org

Riverview Baptist
14 Moreland Ave. E.
West St. Paul
651-457-3831
www.riverviewbaptist.net

Salem Lutheran
11 Bernard St.
West St. Paul
651-457-6661
www.salemluth.org

Spirit of Hope Catholic
2035 Charlton Road
Sunfish Lake
651-760-8353
www.spiritofhopemn.org

St. Anne's Episcopal
2035 Charlton Rd.
Sunfish Lake
651-455-9449
www.saintannesmn.org

St. Elizabeth Orthodox
125 Congress St. E.
St. Paul
651-424-0814
seocc.org

**St. George Antiochian
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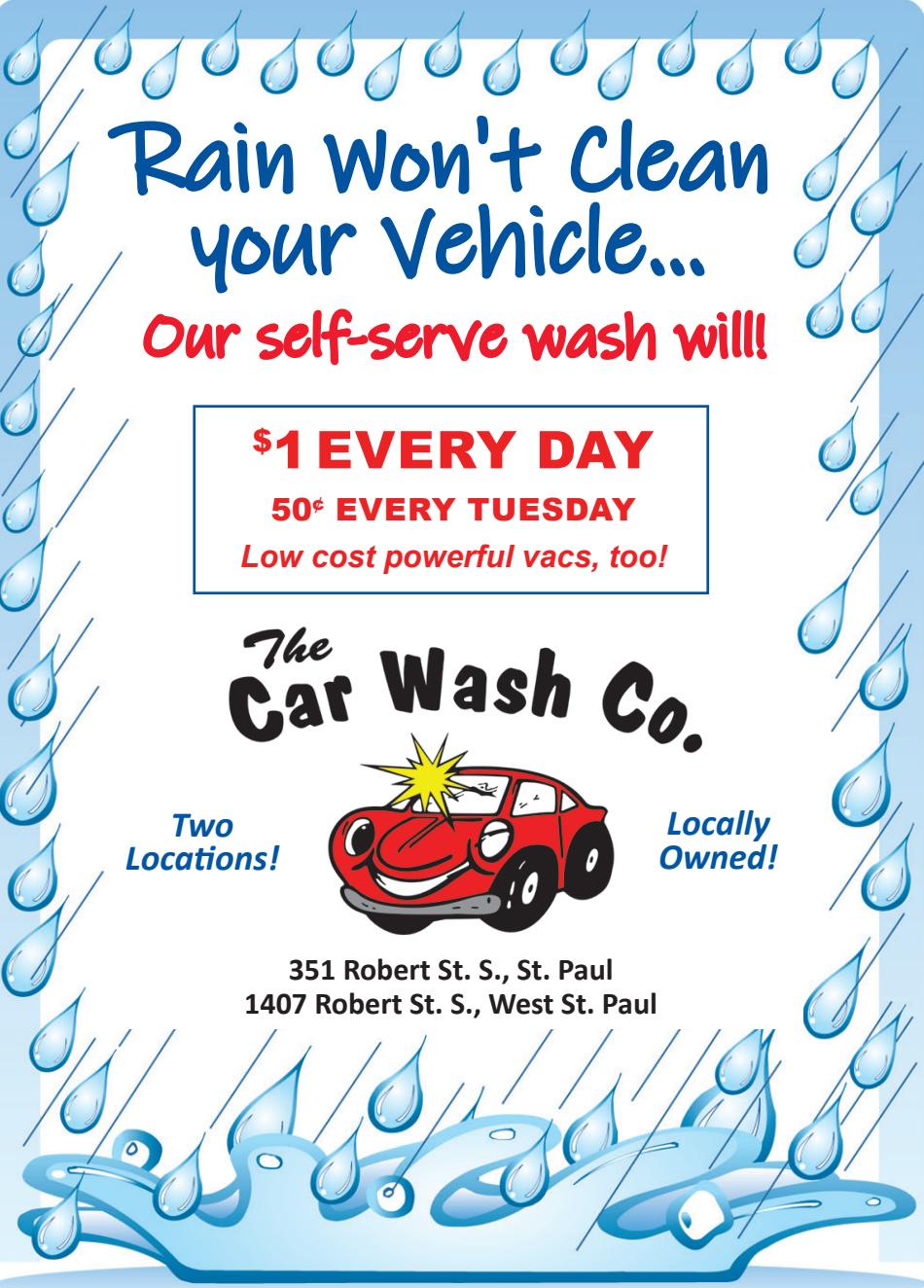
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www.churchofstjoseph.org

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