

Miniature masterpieces

Duluth artist enjoys the challenge of working small.

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Non-toxic lures

Anglers make switch to save birds and catch more fish.

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Fond du Lac Band counters Stauber

Tribal leaders say congressman fails to communicate with them

By Brady Slater
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In an interview this week, U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber addressed his interest in the governorship of Minnesota, and described a “really good working relationship” with the five tribes in his district,



Stauber

saying he articulated to them his opposition to a history-making Native American presidential cabinet nominee.

“I have personally spoken to our tribal leaders, and I’ve heard them out on this issue,” Stauber said. “They know that I remain committed to working with them and continuing to build upon the strong relationship that we’ve developed.”

But the local Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa disputed the congressman’s claims, saying Stauber, R-Hermantown, does not communicate with them in any meaningful way, and called his efforts “failure.”

Through its spokesperson, the band said Stauber declined an offer to sit down with its leadership council to discuss U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland’s nomination to be President Joe Biden’s interior secretary overseeing federal lands and natural resources.

The nomination was a proud moment for the country’s tribes, as confirmation would make Haaland the first Native American to serve on a presidential cabinet.

STAUBER: Page A7



Tyler Schank / tschank@duluthnews.com

Registered nurse Kristin Sullivan administers a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine to Sister Charity Nkwera on Tuesday during Essentia’s mobile vaccine clinic at the St. Scholastica Monastery in Duluth.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Mobile team administers COVID-19 vaccine at monastery

By Andee Erickson
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A couple dozen sisters of Duluth’s St. Scholastica Monastery, and nearly as many staff members who work with them, received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday afternoon.

After, the sisters and staff signed cards for the Essentia Health nurses administering the vaccines as part of the health system’s mobile vaccine unit intended to reach those who would otherwise experience access barriers.

Sister Beverly Raway, the prioress, hopes their

“I told God that when I die I’m planning on going to heaven. And I want it to be real heaven, not a virtual heaven.”

— SISTER PAULINE MICKE

vaccinations will allow the sisters to reunite soon with the sisters who live in the Benedictine Living Community, the assisted living facility next-door. Until that day comes, they’ll continue taking all the usual precautions.

Sister Charity Nkwera said her interactions with the sisters in the assisted living facility has been limited to not much more than making snow angels outside their window and phone calls.

“One called to say, “That was so nice,” Nkwera said

about the snow angels.

The monastery has lost six sisters — only one to COVID-19 — during the pandemic, Raway said. The hardship of those deaths was heightened because most didn’t get the chance to visit their bedsides to say goodbye.

“We have a ritual of prayers for dying and farewell and blessing of the person as they’re dying, laying our hands on them and praying,” Raway said. “We have a really beautiful ritual. Only the administrative staff were able to do that.”

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Steve Kuchera / skuchera@duluthnews.com

Mikaela Willey stands outside the Hibbing HRA building where she and her family live. Willey and her husband are employed and part of the HRA’s Moving to Work program, which has a goal of moving people out of supported housing and into private housing.

Hibbing targets self-sufficiency

Iron Range city’s public housing will add work requirement for tenants in fall

By Brady Slater
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HIBBING — Mikaela Willey knows what it’s like to feel defeated while living in public housing.

That was her situation a handful of years ago, when she and her family followed her father-in-law to Hibbing from Phoenix, resettling near his hometown,

Buhl.

It was a welcome change. But at the time, problems followed. Willey’s husband was over-drinking, and they had few resources, even slipping into a brief period of homelessness.

“It was embarrassing,” Willey, 35, said of being a stay-at-home mother living in public housing. “Now, I don’t see it that way. I look at where we’ve come from, what we’ve accomplished and what we still have to accomplish. But three years ago, I would have been depressed talking about it.”

Her husband is now more

than three years sober after treatment through Range Mental Health Center, and they’re working toward a goal of home ownership. The four kids, ranging from 2 to 19, are settled and content.

And Willey’s plight has become the epitome of what the Hibbing Housing and Redevelopment Authority plans for others as it implements work-related requirements for public housing tenants beginning this fall.

“Essentially, we are trying to empower our residents

HOUSING: Page A6

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WEATHER, PAGE B12

Today
Partly cloudy
High: 20 Low: 13

Tomorrow
Snow showers
High: 28 Low: 18



Duluth contends with rash of water-main breaks

Editor's note: This story was also published in the News Tribune's Thursday e-edition.

By Brady Slater
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The city of Duluth has been contending with a flurry of water-main breaks made worse by several days of subzero temperatures.

Through Tuesday morning, the city had experienced 25 water-main breaks so far in 2021, most coming within the past 10-12 days.

"This is typical for what happens when temperatures drop to minus-20 and stay here for a couple days," said Eric Shaffer, the city's chief engineer of utilities.

The city features 435 miles of underground water piping, most of it cast-iron pipe, along with 55 miles of newer plastic pipe. The cast-iron pipe falls into two categories: higher-grade pipe from the 1880s, and thinner, more brittle cast-iron pipe from the 1950s and '60s.

When a water main

DULUTH WATER-MAIN BREAKS	
2021 — 25 (through Tuesday morning)	2018 — 96
2020 — 2	2017 — 70
2019 — 14	2016 — 48
	2015 — 142
	2014 — 147
	2013 — 139
	2012 — 112
	2011 — 103

breaks, it's because the frost works down deeper into the ground, forcing the old cast-iron pipe to shift, Shaffer said.

Workers close off the two nearest valves to isolate the failing pipe in order to fix the breaks.

"Normally, we go down and put a repair clamp on it," Shaffer said, describing how the clamp wraps around the pipe and includes a rubber gasket tightened around the break. When breaks split the pipe longitudinally, workers cut out the section and put in a replacement piece.

The average repair takes eight to 10 hours, with much of the time spent digging the hole to access the break.

"We try to keep the shutdown as small as possible," Shaffer said, though not every block in the city was designed

to feature shut-off valves, so some breaks are more impactful than others.

Regardless, the city doesn't want residents going too long without water.

"Our target is to always have the water back on before you get up to go to work," Shaffer said.

The city is in the process of phasing in a water-rate increase through 2023. With the increase, the city is attempting to put in 4 miles, or 1%, of new pipe every year. Also, any street reconstruction projects include the addition of new plastic water mains that are immune to the corrosion that's undermining the cast-iron piping.

"Our system is plagued with corrosion issues, caused by the clay solids in the



Steve Kuchera / skuchera@duluthnews.com

A motorist turns onto ice coating Duluth's North 13th Avenue East downhill of a water-main break Monday. Following the break, the city spreads sand over ice covering several blocks of streets downhill of the break.

ground," Shaffer said, explaining the steady diet of corrosion-related leaks the city deals with every summer, most of it related to the thinner cast-iron pipe installed during the last century.

The city is targeting the worst pipes, the ones

that break the most, for replacement first.

Progress is already showing. The city used to experience upward of 160 water-main breaks annually.

That figure fell to 72 last year.

"We've done a good

job on the number of breaks in the city overall," Shaffer said. "The number of breaks continues to go down. We're staying on top of it, and getting as much pipe replaced as we can. We want to stop having people out of water."

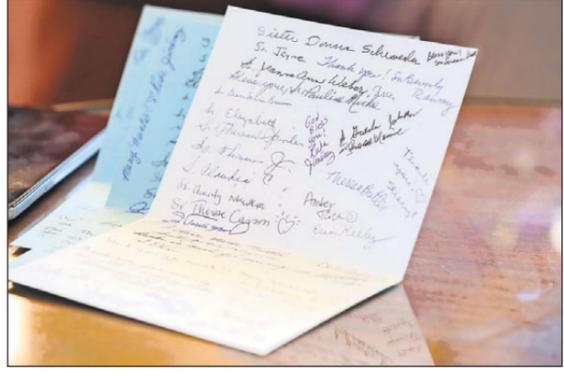
FAITH

From Page A1

The health system is in the process of hiring more staff to ramp up its vaccine capacity, said Jill Doberstein, Essentia's program manager for community outreach.

"People ask about our capacity to do outreach. It just really aligns with our mission and values to make sure we're reaching people," Doberstein said.

In the last couple months, the mobile vaccine team has largely focused on long-term care and assisted living facilities as well as behavioral health settings, per state guidelines, Doberstein said. In the coming weeks, the mobile unit will expand



Tyler Schank / tschank@duluthnews.com

Sisters of St. Scholastica signed cards thanking Essentia employees for bringing a mobile vaccine clinic to the St. Scholastica Monastery on Tuesday.

into neighborhoods to reach those ages 65 and older in underserved communities.

With help from community partners, Essentia's outreach team is planning events in Duluth's Hillside neighborhood and in West Duluth.

"Those community partners are valued

relationships, trust relationships that can help with the vaccine hesitancy piece," Doberstein said.

Local public health, the state, regional health care coalitions and health care providers are in constant communication to determine where the

need aligns with the current phase of the vaccinations.

Organizations with residents or clients who are eligible for a vaccine but have trouble getting to Essentia are encouraged to let the health system know by calling 833-933-0505 or by visiting essentiahealth.org/covid-19/covid-19-community-response-team.

The mobile vaccination team stemmed from Essentia's mobile testing team, Doberstein said. In July, they assembled a team of providers to offer on-site testing at places experiencing outbreaks. In November and December, the unit was testing about 2,500 people a week. Now it's testing less than half that number.

After completing her two-dose vaccine series, Sister Pauline Micke, 80, said she feels fortunate to have made it this far without an outbreak within her living community. That wasn't the case for the neighboring assisted living facility.

Asked how she's feeling now that the monastery has received both doses of the vaccine, Micke said she's eager to experience life outside of Zoom and video calls again.

"I made up a new prayer," Micke said. "I told God that when I die I'm planning on going to heaven. And I want it to be real heaven, not a virtual heaven. I want it to be real. I get so tired of Zoom meetings."

Sister JeAnne Weber, 78, reflected on the little moments that

have carried them through the pandemic, like being able to attend chapel multiple times a day and waving at the camera to those watching from the assisted living facility. She said they haven't felt the loneliness and isolation many have suffered over the last year.

She longs for a day when the sisters in assisted living can return to shared meals, card games and Friday night movies and popcorn.

"Two of us sit at a dining room table together," Weber said. "One of the advantages is that we've gotten to know each other better, because we used to have like four sisters at a table. We're able to ... learn things that we never knew before because we just didn't have that opportunity."

HOUSING

From Page A1

to improve their quality of life through certain requirements you can't do in regular public housing," Hibbing HRA Executive Director Jackie Prescott said.

Last year, the Hibbing HRA was selected among 31 other communities nationally to participate in the federal "Moving to Work" program, a "demonstration" model afforded to fewer than 100 communities nationally. It allows the public housing authority in those communities to relax rules in an experimental effort to move families toward self-sufficiency and shorten waiting lists for other people in need.

"Mikaela is the epitome of the saying we use around here to think about 'Moving to Work,' which is 'from safety net to trampoline,'" said Andrew Jarocki, a Lead for Minnesota fellow serving in the Hibbing HRA. "We want to go a step further. We want to catch people and help bump them up to where they're going."

Hibbing's four public housing complexes feature 252 units serving more than 400 people. But it features a waiting list that, for some people, can last up to 18 months. Graduat-

ing people from public housing would shorten that timeframe for those waiting, and mean upward mobility for those graduating.

"Sometimes, people don't recognize their worth or that they have abilities," Prescott said. "What we're trying to do is break down barriers that are putting them in this place."

Moving to Work is designed for tenants ages 18-62 who are non-disabled. Everyone between 18 and 62 living in an HRA home will be required to complete 15 hours weekly of work, school or some other betterment effort, such as parenting or budgeting classes. They'll meet twice annually with a worker from the HRA, who will help connect them to the services they need and discuss progress toward self-sufficiency across a five-year term limit in public housing.

Along the way, tenants will benefit from new flexibility in the rules. Instead of having their rent — roughly a 30% portion of their income — go up immediately if they get a raise at work or a new income, rents will only be raised every two years regardless of changes, allowing people and families to begin to save pay increases or invest in other needs.

"We really want to help people realize



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Mikaela Willey (right) listens as Andrew Jarocki, a fellow with Lead for Minnesota, talks about the "Moving to Work" program at the Hibbing HRA office recently.

their goals in a timeframe that's realistic and humane, but also purposeful and intentional," Jarocki said.

Jarocki admitted the program "can sound heavy-handed," but said it isn't designed to be paternalistic or punitive. Instead, after offering the hand-up of public housing, the program is the "supporting hand on their backs," he said.

He used Willey's situation as an example. There's no box to check in public housing that would let the HRA know alcoholism is a barrier for a family. That's because under normal circumstances, the HRA is merely a landlord.

But under "Moving to Work," an HRA worker would strive to understand the things holding back a person or a family, and seek to con-

nect them to solutions for issues related not just to addiction, but things such as travel, child care, nutrition and mental health.

"Once you get out there and get motivated and you know you have resources and a support team, it's a lot easier than you think," Willey said.

But what about people who don't want to participate?

"Something we talk about a lot is the worst-case scenario," Jarocki said. "They make it to the end of five years and are completely unprepared for self-sufficiency. But we're designing the program so it wouldn't allow anyone to get to the five-year mark not having had that conversation much sooner."

Eligible residents who sign their lease but later

miss work, school or programming requirements would begin to receive written warnings, with lease termination by a fourth or fifth warning.

Prescott said reviews from existing tenants are mixed. Some are excited, she said, and others are "living in that fear."

"We're hoping to work with them on that and trying to look at this as an uplifting program," she said.

For Willey, the rewards of having spent time in public housing are apparent. She and her husband are going to reapply for a Habi-

tat for Humanity house now that their incomes have risen, with her doing cleaning work for the HRA and him working as a full-timer at a local grocery store.

She said public housing can feel like a backbone that can serve to prevent some people from taking the extra steps needed for self-sufficiency. She admits to feeling that way herself once. But not anymore.

"We work super hard to make sure we are stable," Willey said. "Now, I just want the extra stuff — the house, the car, the dog, the garden."

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