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The St. Paul Voice



Fall Home Improvement
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Your Community News & Information Source

September 2024

Cherokee Dental rebrands, relocates Expands MedSpa services

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

In late August, Cherokee Dental & MedSpa rebranded to Beyond Smiles DentaSpa and moved from its longtime home on Annapolis Street to a newly renovated office about five minutes away at 34 Moreland Ave. E., West St. Paul. The new space is more than twice the size and will allow the business to offer more medical spa treatments, first offered in 2019.

“We had just one [private MedSpa] treatment room at our old location and now we’ve expanded to five,” said Beyond Smiles owner Dr. Joshua Vang, DDS. “I thought about doing it [rebranding] so many times, but Cherokee was such a household name that I did not want to move away from that. At this juncture in my career and in the office, we’ve grown so much that I think it was a perfect time to do it.... We’re doing something that’s totally different than what most dental offices are known for.”

A plethora of MedSpa treatments are available at Beyond Smiles including body contouring, skin tightening, scar tissue breakdown, laser hair removal, kinetic face lifts, Botox injections and wart removal. Last year, the clinic got a state-of-the-art machine that can do injections without the use of needles. Among its uses are injecting platelet-rich fibrin into the scalp to help stimulate hair follicles to

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Displaced square dance club finds new home on the West Side



Submitted photo

Members of Dakota Squares attend dances throughout the Twin Cities and the club hosts its own dances at The Recovery Church, 253 State St.

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

Dakota Squares, a nonprofit square dance club, has been forced to move its do-si-do-ing from West St. Paul to the West Side. For many years, the Club held its dances at Faith United Methodist Church in West St. Paul but had to move about a month ago after the church was sold to M/I Homes, which plans to demolish the building and create townhomes there. It now hosts its dances at The Recovery Church, 253 State St.

Now in its fifth year, Dakota Squares also offers free beginner square dancing lessons on select Mondays at Wentworth Library, 199 Wentworth Ave. E. in West St. Paul. The lessons usually draw about 20 people of varying experience levels, and it typically

takes about four months for newcomers to learn all the terminology and the 68 moves of modern square dancing. Upon completion, they can join any square dance club and attend virtually any square dance event. The next lesson is 6:15-7:45 p.m., September 9.

“Square dancing is a lot of ‘Vitamin E,’ which is fun, fitness and fellowship,” said Dakota Squares vice president John Cook, who noted that each dance includes a potluck. “No matter where you go square dancing, the people are very friendly and more than willing to help new people learn.... We have people coming [for beginner lessons] from Hugo, White Bear, Mound, Bloomington, you name it. Same with our membership, we have them from all over.”

Square dancing keeps you on your toes

Dakota Squares / Page 3

Wheelchair accessible playground built in Mendota Heights

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

More than 150 volunteers gathered at Somerset Heights Elementary in late July and early August to help build a playground for children of all abilities. It was supposed to be built next year after extensive fundraising efforts but everything changed in April when an anonymous donor dubbed the “fairy godmother” pledged \$200,000 to make it a reality this summer.

The new playground is designed to be welcoming to kids with a broad range of physical, psychological, developmental and intellectual abilities. It’s set on a rubberized base rather than wood chips as is commonly found at other playgrounds. It features multiple wheelchair accessible ramps, an accessible swing, in-ground merry-go-round, a slide with a wheelchair transfer station, sensory stations, and a “communication board” with visuals that help less- or non-verbal children indicate what they want to do.

The call to replace the previous 20-year-old playground came early this year from a group of parents at the school who have children with conditions that affect their mobility. The school quickly got on board with the idea and allowed its students to vote on two playground designs. Donations and fundraising efforts kicked off shortly after. To chip away at the \$300,000 price tag, students

Playground / Page 5

WSP and Dakota County join forces to fight fentanyl crisis

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

A new program dedicated to halting the terrible trend of young adults dying from overdoses of illegal fentanyl is in the works for West St. Paul and South St. Paul. The cities are among the hardest hit by the fentanyl crisis in Dakota County.

The cities have partnered with Gateway Recovery Services to apply for two

grants to kickstart a Community Opioid Response and Education program, which would be housed at the South Metro Fire Department. The grants would cover costs for a community EMT, certified peer recovery specialist, and a licensed drug and alcohol counselor. The staff would work with at-risk individuals and likely join first responders on cases involving drug overdoses.

The cities expect to hear by the end of October

whether they will receive the \$1.3 million federal grant or the \$700,000 state grant; they only need one to come through to launch the program. This is the second year the cities have applied for grants to start the program. They were denied funding last year and if they’re turned down again this year, they will explore using funds recently received from Dakota County to launch a smaller scale pilot program.

According to the Minne-

sota Department of Health, fentanyl, a synthetic opioid 50 times more potent than heroin, is involved in 92% of all opioid-involved deaths. Health officials say 6 out of 10 pills contain a lethal dose. Likewise, many other drugs are now being laced with fentanyl to make them more addicting and cheaper to produce and therefore Fentanyl is involved in 62% of all overdose deaths in Minnesota, according to 2022 data. West St. Paul

and South St. Paul, have had 1,037 overdose incidents since 2020; 60% of them in ages 40 and under.

The State of Minnesota received more than \$300 million in a settlement payout early this year as part of several multi-state lawsuits against opioid manufacturers and distributors – total settlement amount to all states combined exceeded \$46 billion. Every county in the state is getting a portion of that funding, which will

be doled out annually over the next 18 years to combat the crisis. Cities with populations over 30,000 will receive additional funds. While South St. Paul and West St. Paul are among the most impacted by opioid overdoses, their populations were too small to warrant direct funding. However, Dakota County already received its 2024 portion – \$2.42 million – and

Drug task force / Page 2

Drug task force

from page 1

allocated \$195,000 combined to the cities of South St. Paul, West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Farmington, Rosemount and Hastings to be used over the next two years. Based on the severity of the issue in each city, West St. Paul received \$35,926, Mendota Heights \$15,451, and South St. Paul \$66,858.

One of the problems in dealing with the opioid crisis, according to West St. Paul City Manager Nate Burkett, is that the county and state systems are hard to navigate. In addition, people who need help are reluctant to reach out for fear of be-

ing arrested or having child protection services step in.

“What we are trying to do is...remove barriers and improve the odds that a person with opioid use disorder can recover and reach their highest possible level of wellness,” Burkett said.

According to South St. Paul City Administrator Ryan Garcia, the city is currently combating the opioid crisis by enforcing controlled substance laws, as well as through public education about the drug’s potentially fatal effects.

“Our embedded team of a Dakota County Social



Photo: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration

A lethal dose of fentanyl

Worker and South St. Paul Police Officer currently follow up on all non-fatal overdoses and provide education and resources in an effort to

break the cycle of use and overdose,” Garcia said.

Dakota County will use the remainder of this year’s allocation to create a strate-



Photo: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration

30 mg counterfeit fentanyl

gic plan to combat the opioid crisis. It will focus on prevention, treatment and recovery, harm reduction, and criminal legal enforcement, and is expected to be complete by spring 2025. This fall, the county will also accept requests for \$390,000 in community-designated funds. To date, it has used settlement funding to hire an opioid response coordinator, expand opioid use disorder services in its jail treatment program and add Naloxone pick-up points at public health offices, libraries and schools. Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose if administered in time. The settlement fund has also paid for a contract with Steve Rumler Hope Network to provide Naloxone training across the county.

Dakota County also operates a drug task force, a cooperative effort among all county law enforcement agencies focusing on halting the sale, distribution and use of narcotics, and investigating gang and violent offender crimes. The Dakota County Sheriff’s Office has three investigators assigned to it and they work closely with an investigator with the Drug Enforcement Administration. Those found in possession of fentanyl are subject to be arrested, jailed, and charged for possession of a

schedule II controlled substance. Those found selling it are subject to the same punishments and also may be held accountable if their sale of the drug resulted in the death of another person.

Dakota County has several major thoroughfares connecting large cities so it’s not surprising to law enforcement officials that illegal drugs come through. In late 2023, local law enforcement in Dakota, Ramsey and Washington counties launched a joint investigation that led to the biggest drug bust in Minnesota’s history according to federal investigators: 280,000 pills with a total street value of about \$2.2 million were confiscated. The Arizona-based trafficking operation that was mailing the drug here in toy stuffed animals was broken up.

According to the task force, overdoses are up since February in Dakota County and show an increased presence of fentanyl in the drug supply, specifically in powder cocaine.

Recovery is possible

According to the U. S. Centers for Disease Control, fentanyl claimed the lives of an estimated 74,702 Americans in 2023. In Minnesota, opioid-involved overdose deaths increased 43% from 2020 to 2022.

The number of medically prescribed opioids, however, has been decreasing since 2017, down 30% between 2017 and 2022 alone. Many people who abuse the drugs began using them first in prescription form.

Anyone experiencing opioid addiction is strongly urged to get help. Recovery resources can be found by visiting fasttrackermn.org. Additionally, fentanyl test strips and Naloxone are available over the counter. For immediate mental health and emotional support, call 988, or text “MN” to the crisis text line at 741741. For emergencies, call 911.

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Dakota Squares

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mentally as much as it does physically. "Callers" instruct dancers which maneuvers to perform on the fly, and it's not uncommon for people to rack up 4,000-5,000 steps at a dance.

A "square" consists of eight dancers – four groups of two – and music can be classical, country, pop or anything else. Two songs are considered a "tip," and many Dakota Squares events fea-

ture line dancing lessons between tips. People of all ages are welcome to participate.

"We have different themes for every dance and a lot of times we have different callers, too," said club treasurer Rose Cook. "Some people follow different callers, so you get a fluctuation of who shows up at each dance." Various callers prefer different genres of music and speeds of dancing, but most

read the experience level of the people on the dance floor and adjust accordingly.

The August dance, which honored Veterans, celebrated the club's fifth anniversary. The September dance will be held 3-5:30 p.m., September 22, and the theme is "School Starting." Cost is \$8 and the caller will be Monte Guenzler. Upcoming themes include Autumn Fest, Giving Thanks, Holiday Dazzle and American Heart. New socks and underwear will be collected at the November dance and donated to The

Drawer, an Eagan-based organization.

Dakota Squares has recently seen a surge in membership. The club added 11 members in the past year, bringing the total to 43, which surpasses pre-COVID numbers. The youngest is 14 and the oldest 93. Members pay a combined \$19.50 in annual dues to the club and its parent organization Square Dance Minnesota, which oversees about 25 square dancing clubs. The club was founded in August 2019 by former members

of Dakota Grand Squares, a different square dance club based in West St. Paul. They chose to break away and form a new group to become a nonprofit. As such, they're able to accept donations for various causes and offer beginner lessons for free.

"Both clubs continue to dance and enjoy square dancing, and we both promote it," said John Cook. "Some of their club members come to our dances. Some of our club members go to their dances.... A lot of

people are members of more than one club."

John and Rose Cook are among the founding members of Dakota Squares, and they help schedule performances throughout the year at nursing homes, fairs, parades and other events to help promote square dancing. Coming up August 30-September 2 they will dance at the Western Minnesota Steam Threshing Reunion in Rollag, Minn. For more information, visit dakotasquares.com.

Back to school updates

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

St. Paul Public Schools

Superintendent search - In early July, St. Paul Public Schools hired executive search firm BWP & Associates to assist in hiring its next superintendent. Joe Gothard, who served as superintendent for seven years, resigned in May to become superintendent for Madison Metropolitan School

District in Wisconsin. John Thein is the interim superintendent.

New Karen programs - A new educational program about Karen culture and language will be offered to kindergarteners at Wellstone Elementary this fall. The plan is to expand it to more grades in the future. Also starting this year are Karen language classes at the district's middle schools.

Leadership changes - Gina Hass is the new princi-

pal of Cherokee Heights Elementary. She succeeds Heidi Koury. Tony Chlebeczek has been named principal at Harding High School. He has been interim principal since last year and previously served as assistant principal at Harding from 2013-2018. He succeeds Be Vang.

St. Croix Lutheran Academy

Portions of the capital improvement project that kicked off last year are ex-

pected to be completed this year and the rest in 2025. The school is getting a new boiler, stadium track, gym sound system, outdoor scoreboard, drama department remodeling, Chromebooks, computers and more.

St. Thomas Academy

New aquatic facility - In partnership with Visitation School and The Opus Group, STA broke ground this spring on a \$12 million aquatic center on the St. Thomas Academy campus. The STA/VIS Michel Family Aquatic Center will be home

to the swim and dive teams for both schools, which collectively have 43 state swim and dive championships. The center will feature a 25-yard pool with eight lanes, a diving board, bleacher seating for 350 and new locker rooms. Construction is slated to conclude in summer 2025.

Leadership changes - Retired U.S. Marine Corps Cpt. Nick Honan has been named commandant of cadets, which oversees leadership training for cadets. He served as interim commandant last year. Marwan

Maalouf has been hired as director of admissions.

New policy - STA has implemented a new policy banning cell phones in classrooms.

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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 and Mendota Heights.

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Beyond Smiles

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promote hair growth. It also has a special machine that is used for skin tightening, red light treatment, skin hydration, and skin and muscle toning.

The dental side of the operation has expanded as well, increasing from five rooms to eight, including one surgical suite. Vang employs two other full-time dentists, and since 2019 the clinic has used laser technology rather than needles for numbing and other procedures. In addition to general dentistry, a few other services offered include same-day crowns, full mouth reconstruction, bridgework and porcelain veneers.

Cherokee Dental was founded in the early 1980s and Vang assumed ownership in 2008. Early in his career he worked for five years as an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry and is now dipping his toes back into teaching. His new space features a room where he can host workshops to certify more of his staff and other health care practitioners in various MedSpa treatments.

For two years, Vang explored how to expand the former Cherokee Dental building or create an adequate space next door, but city zoning codes made

those options unfeasible. He ultimately found the new office in July 2023 and immediately began a complete internal reconstruction and cosmetic overhaul. The space now boasts a luxury spa atmosphere, with MedSpa work taking place on the first floor and dental on the second. All patient chairs have a massaging feature as well as warming devices embedded in them.

“West St. Paul really is the heart and soul of our office, and I didn’t want to leave,” said Vang. “There are families that we’ve been seeing for decades. I’m coming up on my 20th year of treating as a dentist.

“The highlight of the office is the team that I’ve got here,” said Vang, who



Submitted photo

Ribbon cutting ceremony at Beyond Smiles DentaSpa.

employs 16 hygienists, assistants and other staff. “My parents are part of my front desk team, as well as my wife who helps me spearhead a lot of the behind-the-scenes things.... I wanted to keep it

that way, family-owned and run, and making sure that when folks come through, they don’t feel like a dollar sign. They’re part of a family that comes through and I’ve always stuck with that.”

Currently, dental work has a waitlist of six to nine months but there’s availability for the MedSpa treatments. For more information, call 651-457-6231 or visit cherokeedental.net.

The Dance Center closes after nearly six decades

Tim Spitzack
Editor

The Dance Center, a fixture in West St. Paul for 59 years, is no longer operating as a studio for aspiring dancers ages 2 and older. It held its last recital in early

June and stopped offering group classes and performances in July. However, the lights are still on in their space at 2026 S. Robert St. Owner Jennifer Haider and her mother Corrine Martin, who founded the company, still use the space to teach

private lessons, master classes and for choreography work they do with theater companies throughout Minnesota.

The mother-daughter duo has worked together for 30 years. Jennifer was classically trained in ballet from

age 5 to 17, and after high school earned a degree in social work at the College of St. Benedict. She quickly discovered that her true passion was teaching dance and in 1994 joined her mother at the studio to teach ballet, jazz and other dance forms.

Martin, a native of West St. Paul and graduate of Two Rivers High School (then Henry Sibley), started

the company in 1965 at age 19 in an addition her father built on his appliance store, Mike Thomas TV and Appliance, 925 S. Robert St. In 1988 she moved to the Doddway Shopping Center and ran it there until she built her own studio in 1996 at 1049 Dodd Rd., not far from the Doddway Center. Jennifer assumed control of the company in 2020, when Martin had serious health issues. Today, she proudly reports she is five years cancer-free. In the spring of 2020, they sold their building and moved to their current space on Robert Street, across the street from Cub Foods.

Martin, 79, is still active as ever and before the studio closed was teaching four days a week. She continues

to teach private lessons and helps Jennifer choreograph a few shows each year.

“This has been a rewarding business and a rewarding career,” said Martin. “I’ve worked with so many great people. And I’ve taught the grandchildren of my early students.”

Although Martin now lives in Shoreview, her heart remains in her hometown.

“I love West St. Paul,” she said. “I was born and raised there. Being grand marshal of the West St. Paul Days parade [in 2015] was such an honor for me.”

Jennifer Haider, who lives in West St. Paul, also judges dance competitions and lends her choreography talents to local high school theater groups.



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Playground

from page 1

set up lemonade stands, ran a coin drive, and some even shook out their piggy banks for a few dollars to give. Ultimately, about \$35,000 was secured, and in May state legislators passed a bill allocating \$200,000 for playground infrastructure upgrades at local schools in four districts, including ISD 197, which encompasses Somerset. The elementary school received half of that funding, and all that was left was for the fairy godmother to sweep in to make the children's wish come true. The old playground equipment will be donated to a community in Central America or Africa.

Among the workforce were community members, school staff, families from the school, and the Two Rivers High School football team. Tasks included everything from equipment assembly to digging, heavy lifting and installation.

"Our aim at Somerset is to be inclusive of all our students and ensure they feel

like they belong," said Somerset Elementary Principal Libby Huettl in a statement. "We've created ways to do that inside, but when we go outside for recess, many students with physical and cognitive disabilities aren't able to access our playground. This new playground helps those students feel included, seen, and supported by their community."

Anne St. Martin, a project organizer and parent of a Somerset student with mobility challenges, said, "It's wonderful that our community said yes to these kids. There are many things that kids with disabilities can't participate in, so finding ways to involve them in the community is crucial. Being able to join in recess and experience the social-emotional benefits of playing with friends is so important. The community stepped up big time, and we're so grateful."

According to ISD 197, this is the fifth fully inclusive playground at a Minnesota school.

"By law, public schools in the state must meet ADA compliance, but this could be as minimal as cutting an entryway to a curb to provide access to a wood chip playground," said Sara Blair, ISD 197 communications manager. "Such accommodations do not fully meet the needs of all children with disabilities."

The other schools with fully inclusive playgrounds are Glen Lake Elementary in Hopkins, Lake Elmo Elementary School in Lake Elmo, Duluth-Congdon Elementary School in Duluth, and Dowling Elementary School in Minneapolis. A few public playgrounds that meet the criteria include Madison's Playground in Woodbury and Woodhaven Playground in Eagan.

A ribbon cutting ceremony is scheduled for 3:30 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 28,



Submitted photo

A crew of volunteers helped assemble the new equipment.

at the school, 1355 Dodd Rd., Mendota Heights. The ceremony, like the playground itself, is open to the public.

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Exhibits and activities include "The Scramble," "The Studio," "Creativity Jam," "Sprouts," "Our World," "Forces at Play," "Shipwreck Adventures" and "Imaginopolis." Tickets are \$17 on weekdays and \$19 on weekends. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month; reservations are required, and tickets are

limited. The next free date is September 1.

History Center

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

"Reframing our Stories" is featured through October 2025. The exhibit was created from a decades-old box of photographs simply labeled "Indians." Inside the box were dozens of pictures of Native community members, organizations, activities, and events that are relevant today.

"Our Home: Native Minnesota" features historic and contemporary photographs, maps, and artifacts that show how Minnesota's native communities have retained cultural practices, teachings and values.

Other exhibits include "Minnesota's Greatest Gen-

eration," "Then Now Wow," "Grainland" and "Weather Permitting." Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors and college students, and \$8 for children ages five to 17.

History Theatre

30 E. 10th St.
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Historytheatre.com

"Behind the Sun," September 21-October 13. Obie Kipper has finally found the house of his dreams, but there's one problem: it's 1956 and Obie's dream for the future of his family lies outside his redlined neighborhood, in an all-white neighborhood. With help from an old friend and co-worker, Obie puts in motion a sensational scheme to purchase the house. This may either land him in jail or help chart the future for his family and all of Minne-



Summer Nights in Rice, a free outdoor concert series, concludes Sept. 12 with a performance by the Everett Smithson Band, 5-7 p.m.

apolis. Tickets start at \$25.

Landmark Center

75 5th St. W.
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landmarkcenter.org

Woodturning demonstration in the American Gallery of Wood Art, 1-4 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 15. Free.

Human/Nature: Photographs from Western National Parks & Monuments is on display in the North Gallery through September 3. It's a collection of black

and white photographs made between 1992 and 2019 in western national parks and monuments that explore the conflict between preservation and development.

MN Museum of American Art

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

"Together," is a new exhibit on view through October 13. It consists of mixed

media artwork created by 10 Minnesota artists with the help of their children.

"Hilo de la Sangre (Thread of the Blood)," through December 1. Organized with Grupo Soap del Corazón, this exhibition brings together Latine visual artists to consider the significance of blood as the most essential component of life. The museum is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday-Sunday. Admission is free.

bell
museum

Statewide Star Party

International Observe the Moon Night

September 12-14

Join thousands of star gazers across Minnesota and around the world in celebrating the Moon, our closest celestial neighbor!

Attend a star party event near you: z.umn.edu/swsp2024

Mendota Mdwakanton's 27th Traditional Wacipi (Pow Wow)

September 13th, 14th, 15th, 2024

St. Peter's Church Grounds: Mendota, MN, 1405 Sibley Memorial Hwy 55120

MC: Gary Charwood	Men's Head Dancer: George Green
Arena Director: Darwin Strong	Women's Head Dancer: Lisa Bellanger
Host Drum: Scotty Brown Eyes & Drum Group	Spiritual Advisor: Chris Mato Nunpa
Co-Host Drum: Hoka Hey	Mendota Princess: Ameyalli Anderson

Free admission! \$10.00 donation for buttons. Please bring lawn chairs or blankets, seating is limited

Friday, Sept 13th	9:30pm Closing Ceremony
5:05pm Lighting Sacred Fire. (Bob Brown passed at 5:05pm)	9:45pm Registered Dancers Payout
6:00pm Potluck (bring dish to share)	
Saturday, Sept 14th	Sunday, Sept 15th
11:00am Dancer Registration (registration ends: 12:45pm)	11:00am Dancer Registration
1:00pm Grand Entry / Honored Guards / Honoring Veterans	1:00pm Grand Entry
1:30pm Federal Recognition	1:00pm Dancing (Dancing from 1pm to 3pm)
2:00pm Dancing	1:30pm Dancing
4:30pm Honoring Digitizing Group	3:00pm Dancing
5:00pm Huitzillin Dancers	4:30pm Honoring Powwow / Wacipi Committee
5:30pm Dancing	5:00pm Closing Ceremony
6:00pm Dancer Registration	5:15pm Registered Dancers Payout
6:30pm Dancing	5:30pm Feast
7:00pm Grand Entry / Honored Guards	
8:30pm Dancing	

More TBA will be added later.

Thank you for coming to our 27th Wacipi!

NO DRUGS, ALCOHOL, FIREARMS, OR PETS ALLOWED

This is not a Competition Wacipi. Small payout for all Dancers.

Donations are needed & appreciated.

Please check the website and social media for changes and updates
www.MendotaDakota.com

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Ordway Center

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

“Listen!” 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 7. St. Paul Almanac and Walker|West Music Academy unite to present an evening of poetry and music. From \$39.

Samara Joy, 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 12. A live concert from the Grammy Award-winning jazz sensation. From \$45.

RiverCentre

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

Sturgill Simpson concert with special guest Johnny Blue Skies, 8 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 25. Ticket prices unavailable at press time.

Science Museum

120 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-221-9444
smm.org

“Maya: Hidden Worlds

Revealed” is on display through September 4. Presented in English and Spanish, it features more than 200 authentic artifacts, hands-on activities, lifelike simulations and more.

Omnitheater films: “Deep Sky,” through October 31. Uncover the universe through the awe-inspiring images of the James Webb Space Telescope.

“Ancient Caves,” August 1-February 14, 2025. Join scientists and cave divers to explore vast underground worlds in search of geologic clues about the planet’s climate history.

“Fungi Web of Life,” 7 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays. The film unravels how plants and animals would not exist without fungi.

“Stellar Tours: A Star is Born,” Wednesday-Sunday. Follow the life cycle of a star.

Omnitheater tickets are \$9.95. Free for children ages 3 and under. Museum tickets are \$29.95 for adults and \$19.95 for ages 4-17.

Outdoor events

Summer Nights in Rice free concerts, 5-7 p.m. in Rice Park, 109 W. 4th St. Performers are Turn, Turn, Turn on Aug. 29 and Everett Smithsonian Band on Sept. 12.

The City of Mendota Heights will present Teddy Bear Band and The Resistors 6-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 4 at Market Square Park, 720 Main St. Free.

Patio Thursdays, noon-

12:30 p.m., September 19 on Kellogg Mall Plaza by the Science Museum of Minnesota. A lunchtime talk about the Mississippi River with a National Park Service ranger. Bring a picnic or shop the food cart. Free.

370 Sets, 4-6 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 26. This free happy hour event on the patio at Osborn370 in downtown St. Paul will feature live music and complimentary drinks.

Happy 2024 Latino Heritage Month!
September 15-October 15

The Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs celebrates and recognizes the contributions and influence of Latino Minnesotans in every corner of the state.

m MINNESOTA
COUNCIL ON LATINO AFFAIRS

658 Cedar St., Suite G-56, St. Paul MN 55155
mn.gov/mcla/ | mcla.desk@state.mn.us | 651-757-1762

LEGO DERBY CAR RACE

September 28
9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Saint James Lutheran Church
460 Annapolis Street West, West St. Paul

Kids in grades K-8 are invited to build and race a LEGO car. LEGO chassis and bricks provided.

Fun for the whole family!
Lunch provided after the event.

To pre-register, contact:
Saint James Lutheran Church, West St. Paul
651.457.9232 | saintjameslutheran.com
Trinity Lone Oak Lutheran Church, Eagan
651.454.7235 | office@trinityloneoak.org

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Becker named county manager

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners recently named Ling Becker as the next county manager. She succeeds Ryan O'Connor, who left that post in March to become the regional administrator at Metropolitan Council. O'Connor was Ramsey County's top official

since 2018, a role that is responsible for implementing policy and overseeing daily operations of the county and its 4,000-plus employees.

Becker joined Ramsey County in 2019 and most recently was director of Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and executive director of the Workforce Investment Board. Prior to her work with the county she was executive director for the Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corporation and project administrator for the Metropolitan Council, Transportation and Transit Development office. She also

ran her own consulting company for more than a decade and has served on numerous community boards and commissions throughout the county. She holds a master of public administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and a bachelor of arts from the University of Minnesota Morris.

Beruit relocates; Wendy's to open

Robert Street in West St. Paul is seeing some changes on the restaurant front. Beruit, which has served Lebanese cuisine for more than four decades at 1385 Robert St. S., is relocating to Rosemount in mid-September. The restaurant was founded in 1983 by

Joe and Rita Khoury and today is owned and operated by their son John and wife Madelaine Khoury. The decision stemmed from their desire to work closer to home. The Khourys, who live in Rosemount, are also changing their business model from sit-down to fast-casual counter service and carry-out. Their goal is to have multiple locations around the Twin Cities, and even nationally.

HAZA Foods has received approval from the West St. Paul City Council to begin construction of a Wendy's restaurant at the Ten Acres Shopping Center near Cub Foods. The council also approved an ordinance change to allow the restaurant to operate three drive-through lanes.

Holiday tree needed

Union Depot is seeking an evergreen tree for the holiday season. The tree must be located in Ramsey County, 50- to 70-feet tall and in good condition for viewing from all sides. The tree will be illuminated with more than 15,000 energy-efficient LED lights and placed in the North Plaza of Union Depot. Those who would like to donate a tree should email their address and a photo of the tree to info@uniondepot.org or call 651-202-2700. The deadline is Friday, Sept. 20. Union Depot will pay to remove the tree and grind its stump, and the tree owner and their family will be invited to participate in the Holiday Tree Lighting celebration on December 7.

bachelor of science in atmospheric and oceanic sciences; Karissa Tschida, bachelor of science in industrial engineering; Rachel Ziskin, bachelor of science in materials science and engineering

Purchase College dean's list: AnAva Dubeaux

South Dakota State University graduate: Nicholas Gans, master's degree in engineering

Drake University dean's list: Reagan Rapp, Joe Barnard

University of Eau Claire graduates: Sophie Kieser, bachelor of arts in communication; Nick Ball, bachelor of science in nursing

University of Minnesota dean's list: Caroline Casserly, Isabella Costello, Kira DuPaul, Ryan Farrington, Seth Golden, James Landsman, Adrianna Leon, Maya Modelli, Kevin Murphy, Jackson Pindred, Paige Wicklund, Marwa Abdullahi, Aida Broshar, Erik Chavez Romero, Victoria D'Zurilla, Adam Gardner, Jens Henrickson, Michael Landsman, Cyrus Martin Risch, Holly Mingo, Enock Moin-di, Selena Moreno, Jonathan Neumann, Michaela Schaffer, Rachel Sechter, Russell Shaver, Brenna Templin, Tucker Weldon, Molly Altier, Emily Bowers, Adler Dickie, Miles Dunn, Timothy Frazier, Mayeli Hernandez Chavez, Natalie Meyers, Alyssa Newfield, Anja Nilles, Croix Raney, Anthony Rocke, Sarah Wege

St. Olaf College graduates: Emily Klein, bachelor of arts in religion and studio art; Jaelyn Orth, bachelor of arts in sociology/anthropology and Spanish; Julia Zaepfel, bachelor of arts in computer science and theater

Boosters host football fiesta

The West Side Boosters will hold its annual Football Fiesta Saturday, Sept. 14 at the sport fields at Neighborhood House, 179 E. Robie St. A football tournament will take place 9 a.m.-6 p.m. There will also be activities for children, motorcycle and low rider exhibitions, live music and DJs, roasted corn for sale at El Burrito Mercado, street tacos and much more. For more information, visit westsideboosters.com.

Student notes

University of Wisconsin-Madison graduates: Samuel Novillo, bachelor of business administration; Max Kueppers, bachelor of arts, economics; Robin Moody, bachelor of science in education; Veronica Morse, bachelor of science in civil engineering, with highest distinction; Ellie Murphy,



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{ CALENDAR OF EVENTS }

TPAC

Unless noted, all activities take place at Thompson Park Activity Center, 1200 Stassen Lane, West St. Paul. Events are for ages 55 and older. To register, call 651-403-8300.

Mississippi Hot Club concert, 1-2 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 25. \$10, includes dessert. Register by Sept. 18.

Democracy discussion, 10-11:30 a.m., Tuesday, Sept. 10. A captivating class with Richard Painter about the current state of our democracy. \$5. Register by Sept. 6.

Understanding Gender & Sexuality, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 17. This class covers basic concepts such as gender identity, pronoun use, gender expression and sexual orientation. Registration required. \$3.

Explore Mdewakanton: Dwellers of the Spirit Lake at Hocokata ii, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 19. This trip to the 3,800-square-foot exhibition in Prior Lake will deepen your understanding of Mdewakanton Dakota history and culture. \$24, includes transportation but not lunch. Register by Sept. 13.

Nature Preparations for Fall, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Tuesday, Sept. 17. An exploratory hike on TPAC trails to see what's happening in nature on a mid-September day. \$10. Register by Sept. 12.

Creating your Retirement Income Blueprint, 10-11 a.m., Monday, Sept. 30. Explore how retirement income affects your Social Security, Medicare premiums, and taxes. Register in advance. \$3.

Sportswriter Jerry Zgo-

da, 1:30-2:30 p.m., Monday, Sept. 30. Go inside the locker room with Jerry Zgoda, who covered the Timberwolves, Twins, Vikings, Wild, Gophers, and the long-gone North Stars. Register by Sept 25. \$5.

Tai Chi Chih For Health, Sept. 4-Oct. 30. Tai Chi Chih is a moving meditation with 19 easy-to-learn movements. Register by Aug. 30. Free intro class 9:15-10 a.m., Wednesday, Sept. 4; 8-week session, Wednesdays, 9:15-10 a.m., Sept. 11-Oct. 30. \$49.

Hand & Foot card club, Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m.-noon, Sept.-Dec. \$15.

Library

The following events are held at the George Latimer Central Library, 90 W. 4th St. When registration is required, call 651-266-7000. Visit spl.org/events for more information. The library will be closed September 1 and 2.

Headshot photography, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 4. Learn what makes a great headshot and how to take one. Registration required.

PJ Storytime, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 4. Wear your PJs, bring your favorite stuffed animal.

Learn 3D Printing, Fridays, 2-3 p.m. Learn the basics of operating the library's Ultimaker S3 and Lulzbot Mini 3D printers. Registration required.

Saturday Vibe Mid-Autumn Festival, 10:30 a.m.-noon, Saturday, Sept. 7. Bilingual Vietnamese/English storytime, DIY lantern and mooncake crafts, and mooncake with tea treats.

Sewing with Susan, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 7 and 21. Learn how to sew from scratch or get help finishing a project you've started.

Learn Laser Engraving with Dennis, Saturdays, 2-4 p.m. Learn the basics of operating the library's Universal VLS 3.50 laser engraver/cutter. Registration required.

Game Night, 6-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 11. Enjoy card and board games in the Innovation Lab.

Historical Building Tour, 10-11:30 a.m. and 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 14. Explore the downtown library built in the Italian Renaissance Revival style.

Make friends with the sewing machine, 2-4 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 14 and 28. Learn how to use a sewing machine; bring your own or use one of the library's.

Craft Circle, 6-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 25. Bring a project to work on, or start a new one with supplies from the Library.

The following events are held at the Riverview Library, 1 E. George St. Visit spl.org/events for more information. The library will be closed September 1 and 2.

West Side Writers, Wednesdays, 2-3 p.m. Writers of all experience levels bring in pieces of written work, offer each other feedback, and discuss the craft of writing.

Chess Club, Thursdays, 6-7 p.m. Open to ages 8-18, from complete beginners to the more advanced.

Riverview Book Club, 6-7 p.m., Monday, Sept. 9. The title is "Lake of the Woods" by Tim O'Brien.

Robert Street reconstruction input

The West Side Community Organization's Land Use Action Circle is seeking community feedback regarding MNDOT's proposed reconstruction of Robert Street on the West Side. The project is scheduled to begin in 2027, with utility work starting in 2026.

Challenges abound in the corridor: shuttered businesses, a crumbling viaduct, and little attention to pedestrian or bicycle access. Below the surface, the sewer infrastructure is over 200 years old. The street is rated one of the most deteriorated roads in the metro area by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and is classified as a "high injury corridor" in the St. Paul Transportation Action Plan. Despite community support, federal grant funding was recently declined for repairs to the Robert Street viaduct, built in 1930 near Cesar Chavez Street.

"It's not right that one of St. Paul's most diverse neighborhoods continues to receive the least investment," said Monica Bravo, executive director of WSCO, in a statement. "It's time for us to come together to demand that all levels of government invest in the West Side."

MnDOT is planning major road improvements that include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), surface replacement,

and sidewalk improvements. A second opportunity to apply for federal funding to repair the viaduct is coming up this fall. WSCO is working with the University of Minnesota's Design Center (MDC) to get more neighbors involved in a planning process they're calling Destination: Robert Street.

"Our partnership with MDC gives us an opportunity to bring ideas to MnDOT prior to the renovation project – to share our ideas and what Robert Street neighbors desire for the West Side," said Bob Craft, a member of the Land Use Action Circle.

Two opportunities to provide input will take place in September. On September 14, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., visit WSCO's booth at the West Side Boosters' Football Fiesta at Neighborhood House, 179 E. Robie St. Participants will be entered into a raffle drawing for a gift card from select District Del Sol businesses. Attend a community meeting hosted by WSCO's Land Use Circle, 6 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 25 at 209 Page St. W. RSVP at wsco.org/landusesept.

Anyone interested in getting involved in the planning process should contact Nancy at nancykafka@gmail.com or Caprice at capriceglaser1@gmail.com.

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Bringing home the gold

West Sider Eugénie de Rosier received two gold medals in Race Walk at the Minnesota Senior Games, held August 15-18 in St. Cloud. Her winning time was 13:09 in the 1500 meter and 44:33 in the 5000 meter. The 15-sport event is an annual competition for men and women age 50 and older.





In this column last September, I talked about Neighbors' upcoming strategic plan to ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and justice (DEIBJ) would continue to live vibrantly throughout our daily work. Since then, we have continued to move the needle forward in

our commitment. We are excited to share that we will be launching a task force to help develop and implement DEIBJ throughout all core aspects of our organization.

The communities served by Neighbors have continued to be diverse, with 65% of our participants iden-

tifying as BIPOC (38% Latine/Hispanic, 16% Black or African American, 8% multiracial, 2% American Indian, 1% Asian, and 35% White). Neighbors' strategic plan includes the following goals: developing shared DEIBJ language, metrics and annual goals, continuing to prioritize the hire and promotion of BIPOC-identifying and bilingual staff; diversifying organizational outreach initiatives and increasing program offerings/communications for those whose first language is not English; and diversifying the representation of lived experience and communities served in Neighbors' board of directors.

Neighbors continues to

ensure that our programming and services incorporate the core principles of DEIBJ. For example, our food shelf has worked hard to diversify its food selection. Meals are a powerful community connector and an important component in honoring and celebrating culture. Today, we carry an array of culturally specific foods, made possible through partnership with local culturally specific grocery stores, donations and purchasing culturally specific foods.

We understand the importance of providing services in an individual's first language. Our newest positions have required candidates to be bilingual in English and Spanish.

Andrés is bilingual in English and Spanish, was raised in South St. Paul, and after some time in Nebraska is back to help serve his community in our expanding Financial Empowerment Center (jobs, training and financial education). Ana has served Neighbors for several years as a custodian and has accepted a promotion to assist our Resiliency Department in the scheduling of food shelf appointments for our Spanish-speaking clients, as well as assisting the community to connect to critical area resources. To ensure that Neighbors provides services in a person's first language, we also use the Language Line, which provides live

interpreters in more than 240 languages, including American Sign Language. Neighbors is currently looking to fill our bilingual (Spanish/English) Hunger Program Helper and General Building Custodian to start immediately. If you know of anyone who might be a great fit, please have them contact us for an application.

Neighbors is committed to DEIBJ, and we look forward to continuing to develop an organizational culture and practices that embody this commitment. As always, I'd love to connect. You may reach me at dawn@neighborsmn.org, 651-272-1135 or by visiting Neighbors.

POSTSCRIPT

Tiny Tent

I haven't gone camping in a tent in a long time.

I grew up camping, and for much of that time it was in a tent. My parents would take my sister and me to the Boundary Waters between Minnesota and Canada for about a week. We paddled our canoes from one lake to the next and listened to the loons at night. We built fires and ate dried food, which miraculously tasted better the farther we paddled from civilization, and drank water right out of the lake, before we needed expensive filters.



Carrie Classon
CarrieClasson.com

We even used the latrine deep in the woods and I still vividly remember the time I felt flies landing on my behind – only to look down into the

latrine and see a whiskered woodchuck looking up at me!

When I was a teenager, I went camping with a group of girlfriends. We called ourselves the "Future Old Maids of America," or FOMA for short, and had T-shirts made. (None of us remained very loyal to our cause.)

Much later, when I became a 50-year-old graduate student, I splurged on a nice one-person tent and a lightweight air mattress and a compact, fold-up chair. (I've noticed that with both camping gear and lingerie, the less material there is, the more it costs.) I loved camping in my tiny tent, as I drove from the Southwest to the Midwest and back, listening to coyotes and sur-

living the occasional thunderstorm.

So, when an opportunity to go tent camping came up, of course I was tempted.

My first cousins on my mother's side are having a reunion on Lake Ontario, east of Toronto. It's quite far away, and my husband Peter and I had ruled it out because he has to attend an important condo board meeting that weekend.

I wasn't going to go without Peter, but several of my cousins had decided to go without their spouses. As I got thinking about it, I wasn't sure how many more of these opportunities would happen in my lifetime. I am one of the youngest of my original 34 cousins on my

mother's side. Several cousins have died, and none of them live close together. So, this chance to drive to Canada and see a lot of my cousins in one place seemed like it might be important.

I wrote to my Canadian cousin, "Is it too late for me to tell you I'm coming?"

"Of course not!" she said.

I called up my sister. "Do you have room for me in your car?" I asked.

"Of course!" she said.

Her husband is a pastor and does not get much vacation, but my niece and nephew will be coming. And now, so will I. We will camp all the way up and stay in tents while we are there.

Now I'm digging my fancy little tent out of the closet.

I'm airing out my sleeping bag. I'm checking to see if my air mattress still holds air. I'm trying to remember how to assemble my complicated little chair, and I'm pulling together all the things I will need in my tiny tent at night: a flashlight, bottle of water, a puff jacket for the cold.

It will be fun to see all my cousins. I know that.

But right now, I am looking forward to being in my tent again – sensing the changes in the weather, hearing the animals move around at night, feeling that I am entirely outdoors with nothing but a thin layer of polyester between me and the great open sky.

Till next time.

Dakota County: by the numbers

I am a numbers geek who combs closely through County financial, performance and population data. While some folks might find this sleep-inducing, I find that figures frequently tell me more about the health and future of Dakota County than words ever could.

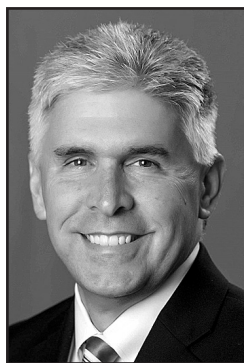
Below are numbers that provide a fuller view of Dakota County and the services we provide.

Population

- Dakota County's population of 443,341 makes us the state's third-largest county. Our most rapidly growing cities are Lakeville, Rosemount and West St. Paul.

- The median age is 39.

- Diversity is growing, with 25% of residents identifying themselves as members of a racial minority



Joe Atkins
Dakota County Commissioner

group.

- 96% of the adult population has a high school degree or higher; 46% have a bachelor's degree or higher. This far exceeds national averages.

- About 6% of the population falls below the federal poverty level. The national poverty rate is 12%, and 10% in Minnesota.

- The median household income is \$101,360.

Safety net services

- Dakota County provided social services to 26,313 households in 2023.

- Collected and distributed \$38 million in child support in 2023.

- Assisted 96,500 people in qualifying for health insurance.

Transportation

- We maintain 1,050 lane miles of county roads and inspect 164 bridges. Motorists travel nearly a billion miles on county roads annually.

- We maintain a total of 808 vehicles and pieces of equipment, with the largest being 27 tandem snowplow trucks.

Parks

- We have protected and restored 12,000 acres of natural areas, woodlands and lakes since 2003. The most recent area permanently protected is eight acres of ma-

ture oaks in West St. Paul near Highway 52 and the South St. Paul border.

- Our six parks and seven regional greenways comprise 5,508 acres.

- 2.9 million people visited the county park system in 2023.

- 8,000 annually rent equipment (canoes, kayaks, skis, snowshoes, etc.).

Libraries

- 1.2 million people visited the county library system last year.

- 4.1 million items are checked out annually among the 10 branch library locations.

Environmental safety

- 500,000 tons of waste are generated in Dakota County annually, with 55% of it being recycled or composted.

- Dakota County oper-

ates the 116-year-old Lake Byllesby Dam, which creates a 1,054-acre recreational lake and generates \$1 million in renewable energy annually.

- We will increase our energy efficiency this year by installing a total of 875 kilowatts of solar panels at three county locations.

- Indoor lighting at 14 county buildings is being upgraded from fluorescent to much more efficient LED bulbs this year, resulting in significant operational savings each year.

Public safety

- Adult felony cases in the county dropped from 2,183 in 2022 to 1,829 in 2023.

- There were 9,126 bookings in the county jail last year.

Efficient government

- The average county portion of property taxes paid

by owners of a median value home in Dakota County is \$1,001 less than a similarly valued home in neighboring Ramsey County.

- About 20% of a homeowner's total property tax bill goes for county services. The remainder goes to fund local schools, cities and other taxing jurisdictions.

- Nearly 3,400 volunteers donated more than 28,517 hours in 2023. The combined volunteer efforts saved taxpayers more than \$906,840.

Joe Atkins represents District 2 on the Dakota County Board, which includes South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights. Elected Chair of the Board in 2024, he welcomes feedback. To share comments, concerns or questions, contact him at Joe. Atkins@co.dakota.mn.us or call 651-438-4430.

Must-do fall home maintenance projects

As summer winds down and the days get shorter, it's time to turn your attention to some projects that will ensure your home survives the winter and that you don't have any unwelcome surprises in the spring. Here are projects that should be done each fall. There are plenty of videos on YouTube and other online resources to help with the easier projects. For complicated projects, hire a licensed contractor and be sure to check referrals and get contracts in writing, including any change orders.

Roof, siding and gutters - Walk around your home and inspect your roof, siding and gutters. Shingles or siding that are damaged should be replaced to prevent water from entering your home and creating an even bigger problem. Gutters should be cleaned thoroughly. For your safety, this should be done from a ladder, not sitting on top of the roof and leaning over. You might consider installing gutter covers at this time to prevent debris from entering the gutters in the future. If your home's exterior, doors or window frames have peeling paint, scrape it, prime it and repaint now. Now is a good time to clean your windows and siding as well.

Windows and doors - Inspect windows for cracks and replace damaged weather stripping or caulk around windows and doors. Check



for drafts. If you feel air coming through, especially on windy days, it might be time to start saving for new windows. While it's a big upfront investment, energy efficient windows will save you money on your energy bills.

Outdoor water faucets - Never leave a garden hose connected to a faucet in the late fall and winter when temperatures drop near or below freezing. This could lead to a pipe bursting. Some older homes have faucets that need to be drained each fall. This is done by closing the shut-off valve inside the house and opening the faucet to drain the water. Turn off the faucet and repeat the process for each exterior faucet. Drain and store hoses. If you have an in-ground sprinkler system, it, too, must be drained. On some older homes, it's a good idea to wrap insulation around outdoor faucets and pipes in unheated garages.

Appliances and fireplaces - Grass clippings and leaves can accumulate around central air conditioning units.

Clean out the debris and rinse off the screens of the unit with water. If your furnace is old or exhibiting erratic behavior, it should be professionally inspected. If you have a wood burning fireplace, it should be professionally cleaned every three years, or sooner if it is heavily used. Older fireplaces should also be inspected for cracks and damaged flues. Check for frayed cords and wires on appliances, and clean lint from the dryer vent.

Cement and asphalt - If your driveway and sidewalk are showing their age, fill the cracks to prevent further damage. Consider sealcoating your driveway to extend its life.

Decks and patios - Clean and stain or seal your deck



in the fall, and clean patios and repair damaged bricks or pavers.

Lawn - Leaves should be raked, and the lawn mowed before winter. Fall is the best

time to aerate the lawn. Apply grass seed to bare spots or overseed the entire lawn before the first snowfall for a lush lawn in the spring.

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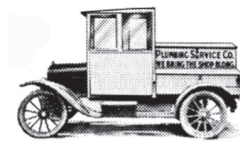
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