



Rock County STAR HERALD

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Thursday, October 24, 2019

The heat is on

New boilers online for Luverne school construction project

By Mavis Fodness

Students and staff at Luverne Middle-High School are enjoying better learning conditions after new boilers came online Monday.

"They haven't had air conditioning or heat since classes started Sept. 16 because of the school construction project that included updating the 1960s boiler system.

"The staff and students have been patient and resilient to any distractions from construction," said Superintendent Craig Ofstedahl.

District text messages reminded staff and students to dress appropri-

"I just wore my winter coat all day. A lot of kids complained it was cold — they weren't dressing the way you should."

— Gabbie Miller, LHS senior

ately for the potential temperature fluctuations in the building.

The west side of the building remains open to the elements after demolition made way for a new commons and performing arts center between the middle-high school and the elementary school.

Temperatures in September averaged 66 degrees, but they fluctuated widely between 80-degree warm spells and 40-degree cold stretches.

Humidity condensed on desks and chairs, which needed to be wiped

Heat on at school/see page 2



Mavis Fodness photo/1024 School Build Lobby

Workers pour footings Monday for the new lobby and commons, which are being constructed between the elementary and high school buildings.

Hills nonprofit Rock Ranch unveils expansion

Couple launches pledge campaign to build arena for equine therapy programs

By Mavis Fodness

The pairing of horses and humans at Rock Ranch is leading the nonprofit program on a path to expansion.

Dan and Marie LaRock started Rock Ranch in 2016 at their acreage near Hills as a place for children to learn about horses and how to ride them.

Today Rock Ranch has a senior saddles program for ages 55 and older and it recently piloted a counseling program for victims of human trafficking and others who have experienced trauma.

With new programs and public interest, the LaRocks are expanding their operation with an indoor arena south of their farm.

Now is the time

They recently launched a pledge campaign to raise \$680,000 for an 80-by-200-foot heated building to include an 80-by-120-foot riding arena, five horse stalls, a conference room, offices, restrooms and a handicap-accessible viewing platform.

A 60-by-100-foot riding arena will be constructed outdoors.

"Two years ago we began dreaming of an indoor arena," Dan said. "Now is the time to explore moving indoors."

Marie, who works full time with the ranch, said this year's wet and cold weather prompted many extra hours rescheduling sessions for the three programs.

The ranch currently owns eight horses in the therapeutic riding program ranging from a small pony to a tall Thoroughbred.

The move indoors would eliminate weather factors and allow participation in each of the three programs to grow.



Mavis Fodness photo/1024 Rock Ranch Arena

Dan and Marie LaRock hold the plans for an indoor arena to expand the therapeutic riding program through their Rock Ranch program. A pledge campaign is currently underway to raise \$680,000 for the project.

Ranch programs grow 144 percent since opening

So far, Rock Ranch has experienced a growth of 144 percent since opening in 2016.

This year 122 sessions were completed with 276 visitors, and there are 17 families on a waiting list for the children's riding program. The ranch has 15 active volunteers.

This fall, Marie helped pilot

called Eagala through the Sioux Falls-based Call to Freedom, which helps victims of human trafficking navigate healthier life paths.

The 25-session counseling program helped eight victims of trauma last fall.

Dedicated to equine therapy

"People who have experienced trauma often have difficulty talking about what they have gone through,"

said Marie, who worked in the mental health field before opening the ranch.

"Traditional talk therapy isn't always the most effective method to treat victims. This kind of therapy allows clients to see things from a different perspective."

The indoor arena would allow more groups to partner with the

Rock Ranch expands/see page 8

Ringneck Reunion set for this weekend

By Lori Sorenson

Plans are in place for this weekend's Rock County Ringneck Reunion, which builds on the 2018 Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Hunting Opener in Luverne.

The two-day celebration Oct. 25 and 26 features pheasant hunting, a Rock County Pheasants Forever Banquet, live music at Take 16 and a first-ever poker run with side-by-side all-terrain vehicles.

"It's a carry-over from last year's Governor's Opener that we're returning into a pheasant hunting celebration to draw people back to Luverne and Rock County," said Rick Peterson, one of the organizers.

"I want people to think about pheasant hunting and think, 'Let's go back to Luverne.'"

Peterson's column on the Opinion Page offers more details, but a recent update to plans is that the Veterans Hunt Saturday has now been opened to first responders, firefighters and law enforcement personnel. "All they need is a small game license and pheasant stamp and they're good to go," Peterson said. The weekend kicks off with the annual Rock County Pheasants Forever Banquet at Take 16. Social hour and silent auction bidding starts at 5:30 and dinner is at 7 with live auction, raffles and games to follow.

The banquet wraps up at 9 p.m. with live "electric country" music, "The Fattenin' Frogs," under the tent

Ringneck Reunion/see page 2



Trains on the move back up cars at intersections in Luverne

More train traffic than usual will move on the Buffalo Ridge Railroad through Luverne and, as a result, Ellis & Eastern Railroad officials have been notifying the Rock County Sheriff's Office about potential road blockages as railcars are moved on the line. Motorists can subscribe to the Nixle message system through the Rock County Sheriff's Office website for upcoming road blockages, especially to Highway 75 (pictured above Monday). "It's an inconvenience," Sheriff Evan Verbrugge said. "But it will be for short periods of time." Verbrugge urged rail officials to allow a 30-minute notice before moving railcars.

Mavis Fodness photo/1024 Train Traffic



Ellsworth district asks voters for operating cash

By Lori Sorenson

Ellsworth School District residents are again being asked for money to keep the doors of their school open.

At an Oct. 15 public meeting, they learned about a proposed 10-year \$1,779.50 per pupil operating levy.

"We're out of gas," Superintendent John Willey said about the reason for the referendum. "The state of Minnesota hasn't kept up with funding to schools at the level that is needed to cover expenses."

If voters approve the referendum, the district would garner an additional \$97,000 per year, which is the maximum amount the state will allow Ellsworth to ask for.

But it's not enough to satisfy a hole in the budget.

Ellsworth's 2018 revenues were \$1,906,775 and expenditures

"It will help us for a couple years, and then we'll probably have to come back and do this again."

Supt. John Willey

were \$2,096,375, resulting in a shortfall of \$189,600. The simple math wasn't lost on residents at the meeting.

Even with the additional \$97,000 in new referendum funds, expenses would still exceed revenue by \$82,600, which means Ellsworth's dwindling reserves would need to cover the gap.

"It will help us for a couple

Ellsworth referendum/see page 5





Graphics courtesy of Rock Ranch

The Rock Ranch arena will be built on six acres of farmland donated by Dan and Marie LaRock.

Rock Ranch expansion/continued from page 1

ranch to expand their counseling options.

Because of their dedication to equine-led therapy, the LaRocks are committed to moving the project forward through the use of their own personal funds and the donation of their own farmland to the arena project.

They are working with Dysthe Construction to develop the six-acre site and the plans for the indoor arena.

Here's how to give

The LaRocks have formed a nine-member steering committee to oversee the pledge campaign that will help with the construction costs.

Pledges, which can be dropped off at Security Savings Bank in the tri-state area,

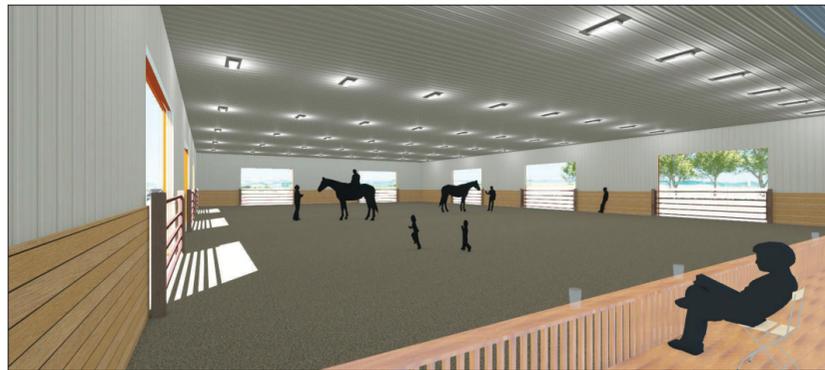


The LaRocks have also planned a large conference room to host meetings. The room would be open to organizations seeking a place to meet.

can be made one time or over a three-year period. The pledge campaign will continue now through the end of the year. Rock Ranch is a 501(c)3

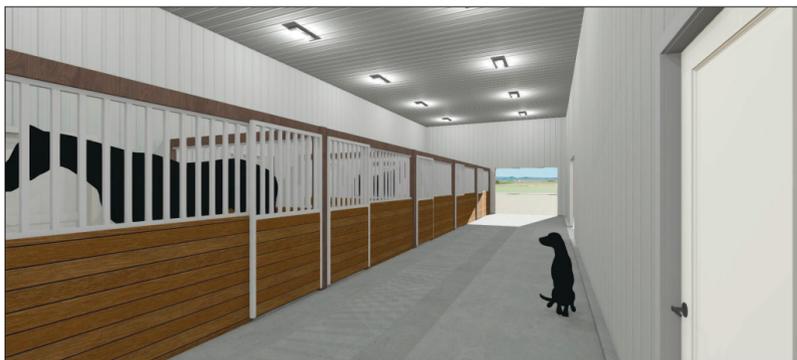
organization. More information about Rock Ranch and the arena project can be found on the group's website, www.riderockranch.org.

Groundbreaking for the arena is planned for November with a projected finish in the spring of 2020.



At left: A handicapped-accessible observation deck allows spectators to watch activities in the indoor arena.

Below: Inside the Rock Ranch arena structure will be five stalls to house the horses used in the therapeutic riding program.



Rock Ranch recently launched a pledge campaign to raise \$680,000 for an 80-by-200-foot heated building to include an 80-by-120-foot riding arena, five horse stalls, a conference room, offices, restrooms and a handicap-accessible viewing platform. A 60-by-100-foot riding arena will also be constructed outdoors.

Fall harvest season behind normal

By Kent Thiesse
Farm Management Analyst

The 2019 harvest season started late in the Upper Midwest and is further delayed by wetter than normal weather in many areas.

As of Oct. 15, the weekly USDA Crop Progress Report listed only 19 percent of the soybeans harvested in Minnesota, compared to a 5-year average of 62 percent harvested by that date.

Iowa reported only 17 percent of the soybeans harvested by Oct. 15, compared to an average of 43 percent harvested by that date. North and South Dakota were at 16 percent and 13 percent of the soybeans harvested.

Nationwide, 26 percent of the soybeans were harvested by then ... well below the 5-year average of 49 percent harvested by that date. There was some significant advancement in the soybean harvest in many areas during this past week.

According to the Oct. 15 Crop Report, only 5 percent of Minnesota's 2019 corn crop had been harvested, compared to a 5-year average of 19 percent by that date.

Iowa had only 7 percent of the corn crop harvested by Oct. 15, South Dakota was at 3 percent harvested, and North Dakota had only 1 percent of the corn harvested.

Nationwide, 22 percent of the corn crop had been harvested by Oct. 15, compared to an average of 36 percent typically harvested by that date.

Another concern in some portions of Minnesota and northern Iowa, as well as in North and South Dakota, is the fact that some corn was not mature when the first frost occurred during the week of Oct. 7-13.

While this is slightly later than the normal first-frost date in many locations, the freeze still came too early for large numbers of corn acres in the Upper Midwest that were planted in late May and early June.

The USDA Report on Oct. 15 listed the following percentages for corn that had reached maturity: Minnesota at 66 percent, Iowa at 72 percent, South Dakota at 53 percent, and North Dakota at 42 percent.

This means that potentially nearly one-third of Minnesota's corn crop and nearly half of North and South Dakota's corn crops had not yet reached maturity when the first killing frost occurred.

When a killing frost occurs before the corn is mature, it can reduce yield, result in lighter test weights, and slow the field dry-down of the corn.

Early reports of soybean

yields have been highly variable across southern Minnesota and northern Iowa.

Reported whole-field soybean yields of 50-60 bushels per acre have been quite common in many areas of south central Minnesota, with a few yields exceeding those levels. There were some reduced yields in areas that were impacted by late planting and excessive rainfall during the 2019 growing season.

Areas that are dealing with harvest challenges due to excessive rainfall and the early mid-October snowstorm are also likely to have yield reductions.

The 2019 soybean yields in most areas of the Upper Midwest will likely be average or below, compared to normal soybean yield levels, and well below the record soybean yields that some farm operators have experienced in recent years.

Due to limited corn harvest progress in most areas, it is a bit early to project yield trends for corn in the region. It is expected that corn yields across the Upper Midwest will be highly variable, just as the soybeans have been.

In many areas, the 2019 corn crop has been challenged the entire growing season by late planting, severe storms, late maturity, and finally by harvest challenges. It appears that the region is going to have a very long and tenuous harvest season for corn this fall.

Producers are hoping that the harvest moisture of the corn coming out of the field starts to decline; however, this could be a challenge as we get later into the fall, especially on corn that had not reached maturity.

Most of the corn being harvested in south central Minnesota in the past week has been at 24- to 28-percent moisture, meaning a significant amount of additional drying is required before the corn is placed in on-farm bins for storage.

Corn should be dried to about 15-16 percent moisture before going into the grain bin for safe storage until next spring or summer.

In late October and early November, the field moisture content of the corn is only likely to drop one-quarter to one-half percent per day under favorable conditions, and lesser amounts in cool, cloudy weather.

For additional information contact Kent Thiesse, Farm Management Analyst and Senior Vice President, MinnStar Bank, Lake Crystal. (Phone: 507-381-7960; email kent.thiesse@minnstarbank.com; website: www.minnstarbank.com.)

Atlas/continued from page 7

agencies that may need immediate housing for individuals or families.

Matthew 6 Outreach is for Rock County residents facing life-threatening medical conditions.

The group provides support to families both emotionally and financially.

Since 2006, Matthew 6 Outreach has helped more than 50 families, donating more than \$50,000 to those in need.

Recently the ATLAS office became the new home to the Luverne Backpack Program.

The group uses a large back conference room to assemble more than 150 food bags for school-aged children in Luverne each week.

"We had the space and we weren't using it," Heidem said.

ATLAS also provides space for the One Warm Coat program, which accepts new or gently used winter coats through Oct. 31 and distributes them Nov. 2 and 7.

A box in the ATLAS lobby is available for the coat donations.

No more banquets

ATLAS supporters used to organize a community fundraising banquet each fall but stopped last year.

Heideman said instead of one large event, ATLAS completes several smaller events, such as Pizza Ranch Tip Night, throughout the

year. All donations are used within Rock County.

Currently the group is weighing options for an updated, more reliable delivery van for pick-ups and deliveries.

"We won't take that out of town," Heideman said.

In addition to a van, the group would also like to fill an empty position on its ATLAS board of directors.

For more information, the ATLAS office is open from 9 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Laura Luitjens works part time for ATLAS as the organization's administrative assistant.

The phone number to ATLAS is 507-449-5777.



The Holiday Season will soon be upon us. It is not only a time for families to share memories, but also a time to create new ones. In an effort to help, we would like to invite you to our annual:

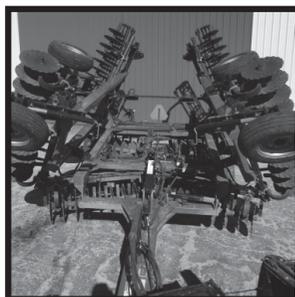
"Service of Remembrance"

Sunday, November 3, 2019
1:00 PM
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We ask that you R.S.V.P. with the number that will be in attendance from your family by Thursday, October 31, 2019. We may be reached at 507-283-2777.



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