



Rock County STAR HERALD

Rock County's oldest business, printing since 1873

Thursday, October 1, 2020

Dreams become reality

Rock Ranch indoor arena ready for year-round classes

By Mavis Fodness

A year ago, Dan and Marie LaRock dreamed about an indoor arena for the equine-assisted therapy and riding programs at their nonprofit Rock Ranch.

Marie, who works full time for the ranch, spent much of 2019 rescheduling or canceling the outdoor classes due to the multitude of inclement days.

When she did have classes, she and her group of 20 volunteers spent hours grooming mud from the nine horses prior to participants' arrival.

Next week Rock Ranch will host an open house from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8, to

**Rock Ranch celebration
open house is 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Oct. 8, at ranch**

celebrate the completion of the 80-by-200-foot building that will allow the program to grow.

The new facility includes a riding arena, five horse stalls, a conference room, offices, restroom, a handicap-accessible viewing platform and indoor wash area for the horses.

"We are excited," Dan said. "I can't believe it was a year ago we were sitting at the kitchen table talking about it."

Construction took almost eight months, due to the availability of building supplies.

While the main structure is finished, a long "punch list" remains, including finishing the outdoor arena and fencing for the paddock and pasture.

Fundraising reaches the \$680,000-plus goal

Rock Ranch's board of directors launched a fundraising campaign this spring with a goal of raising \$680,000. Within months, more than 80 donors responded with average gifts of \$1,000

Rock Ranch celebration/continued on page 5

City says 'yes' to pool and fitness expansion

\$5 million project, including splash pad, to be complete 2022

By Lori Sorenson

Luverne City Council members took action at their Sept. 22 meeting to go ahead with the planned expansion and remodel of the pool and fitness center.

The \$4.8 million project, which includes an outdoor splash pad on the south side of the pool, could be completed in May of 2022 if all goes as planned.

In addition to the splash pad, improvements will include:

- new locker rooms.
- four family changing rooms.
- flat space rooms for group aerobic exercise.
- new office space and staff area.
- larger rooms for both 24-hour weightlifting and aerobic exercise machines.
- new mechanical and heat, ventilation and air-conditioning for the facility.

According to the timeline discussed at Tuesday's meeting, plans and specifications will be completed by architects in the next few months with help from the steering committee, and plans will be sent to prospective bidders in November.

Bid letting would be in January of 2021, and the yearlong construction process would start that spring.

The council discussed the fact that facility use is limited to only 50 percent due to the pandemic, so timing the project during an already limited use would be appropriate.

City Administrator John Call said this project wasn't hatched overnight.

"The Luverne Aquatics and Fitness Center Expansion has been on the city's planning priority list since the January 2016 goal-setting session by the Luverne City Council," he said.

The project went through a public planning process in the summer of 2016 facilitated by the city with technical assistance from Sanford Health.

A steering committee was appointed by the mayor in 2019, and the committee was assisted by CO-OP Architecture from Sioux Falls.

How will it be paid for?

At Tuesday's meeting, City Finance Director Barb Berghorst shared information about how the \$4.89 million will be funded.

"In an effort to be really conservative and make sure I don't underestimate anything, I added in a half million for furnishings and equipment and all of the bond issue costs," she said.

She said that amounted to a \$5.8 million tax abatement bond issue to be repaid over 20 years at an

Pool and fitness project/see page 8

Airport fire damages include office shop, planes

FBO sets up temporary avionics shop in nearby hangar

By Lori Sorenson

Local officials are assessing damages at Luverne's Municipal Airport after a Wednesday night fire broke out in the main building.

Fire crews were called to the scene shortly after 10 p.m. on Sept. 23 and arrived to find an active fire along the north wall of the airport office and shop building.

Fire damage was contained to the office area and adjoining wall to the shop, but insurance adjusters noted significant heat damage throughout the building and to three planes in the repair bays.

Luverne Mayor Pat Baustian and City Administrator John Call met with insurance representatives and State Deputy Fire Marshall Brian Peterson Thursday morning at the airport.

Baustian said the building appears to be structurally sound, but given the extreme heat, he said it's unclear how extensive the actual damage might be.

"It was so hot the exit signs melted and were hanging down," Baustian said.

"The windshields in the planes that were parked inside bowed in from the heat."

Fixed base operator Ben Baum, who operates his Sierra Delta Avionics business on site, was working on the aircrafts.

One of the planes, a 1976 Cessna, belongs to Twin Cities pilot Scott Johnson who was having Baum work on the avionics equipment in the dash.

"It is the most desired version of that plane," said Johnson, who flies for business and personal travel. "It's the P-model. It's the fastest of the 182s. That was my baby."

Airport fire/continued on page 8



Mavis Fodness photo/1001 Rescue Training Hills

Safety consultant Jack Volz, Minnesota Lake, (center) lifts one panel of the updated grain entrapment rescue panels into place Thursday night, Sept. 24, for Hills Fire Department volunteers. **Pictured below,** Hills firefighters Dalton Bass (left) and Lance Larson demonstrate how to find a grain-entrapped victim.

Hills rescue crews train with new grain entrapment equipment

By Mavis Fodness

Hills volunteer firefighters spent several hours Thursday evening, Sept. 24, learning how to use new rescue equipment in grain entrapment emergencies.

"It's an extremely versatile piece of equipment," said Hills Fire Chief Jared Rozeboom. "There are a variety of ways to put this together — it doesn't have to be a perfect circle."

Ten curved, metal interlocking panels slide together to surround a victim or lock side by side to mimic the curve of the bin, if a person is trapped against the inside of the bin.

Jack Volz of Safety and Security Consultation Specialists of Minnesota Lake led the training and showed rescue crews how to use the equipment, which is made by Outstate Data of Elbow Lake.

He traveled to Hills pulling a specially designed training center, a trailer consisting of a gravity-flow wagon box filled with plastic beads to mimic grain and other equipment, including an auger, common at farm sites.

Volz's training in Hills came the day

Grain rescue equipment/see page 13



Fugitive steals minivan from Steen acreage

By Lori Sorenson

Rural Ellsworth native Tyson Wessels, 42, was arrested Friday night in Yankton, South Dakota, after two days on the run from law enforcement.

According to information from the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, Wessels escaped custody Tuesday during transport with another inmate from a court appearance in Turner County to the Minnehaha County Jail.

Authorities say Wessels assaulted a Turner County deputy on Interstate 29 near the Harrisburg exit and stole the patrol car.

He then drove to a field near Worthing, South



Dakota, where he left the squad car and the other inmate and stole a 2004 Ford pickup.

That night he drove to the acreage of Derek and Holly Sammons near Steen where he stole a Chrysler Town and Country minivan.

Surveillance cameras captured the burglary — Wessels entering the house and emerging with a canned beverage, and at that point Rock County law enforcement got involved in the case.

According to Sheriff Evan Verbrugge, it is

Fugitive burglarizes Steen acreage/see page 2

County levy to rise 2.15 percent

By Mavis Fodness

Rock County Commissioners are proposing a 2.15-percent levy increase for taxes payable in 2021.

The proposed 2021 increase garners an additional \$127,000 for a total levy of \$6.3 million, or about half the county's annual budget.

Included in the 2021 budget is \$79,000 earmarked for reserves. The amount would be the seventh straight year commissioners added to the reserve fund.

"You've done a really great job allocating money to the reserves

— you've resisted the temptation to spend it," County Administrator Kyle Oldre said at the Sept. 22 commissioners' meeting.

Currently the county can operate for more than 10 months if no more money is added to the general fund for expenses, according to the 2019 audit report. State auditors recommend counties keep at least a five-month reserve.

However, when combined with the remaining funds — public works,

County levy/continued on page 3



Opinion
Obituaries

Page 4
Page 7

Sports
Public notices

9
11

Volume 145, Number 40

Luverne, MN 56156 USPS 468-040

www.star-herald.com

How to reach us

507-283-2333 PO Box 837
editor@star-herald.com Luverne, MN 56156

ON THE RECORD

Dispatch report

Sept. 18
•Complainant reported DVD theft from location on W. Main Street.
•Complainant on W. Lawn Park Avenue reported an arrow hit her garage door.
•Complainant north of 150th Avenue and 91st Street reported a hayrack blocking roadway.
•Complainant on 263rd and 485th Avenue, Valley Springs, reported a four-wheeler accident.
•Complainant on S. Church Avenue, Kenneth, reported threats.
•Complainant on Roundwind Road reported vehicle for dangerous driving.
•Complainant on 221st Street, Jasper, reported a vehicle parked in road at location.
•Complainant on Highway 75 reported a vehicle for driving conduct.
Sept. 19
•Complainant on County Road 12 and Highway 23, Jasper, reported debris in roadway.
•Complainant on County Road 9 and 81st Street, Luverne, reported grain cart tipped over on roadway.
•Complainant on W. Mead Court reported suspicious activity.
•Complainant at Blue Mounds State Park requested a drive-by at location.
•Complainant on S. Kniss Avenue requested a deputy for assistance.
•Complainant on 141st Street, Magnolia, reported an assault.
•A driving complaint was reported westbound on Interstate 90, into Luverne.
Sept. 20
•Complainant on S. Kniss Avenue reported a customer was locked out of vehicle.
•Complainant on E. Crawford Street reported excessive vehicle noise.
•Complainant on E. Dodge Street reported a parking complaint.
•Complainant on 6th Avenue, Worthington, requested to speak to an on-call social worker.
Sept. 21
•Report of road closure by highway department at location on 191st Street, Jasper.
•Vandalism was reported at location on E. Main Street.
•Complainant eastbound on Interstate 90, mile marker 3, Beaver Creek, reported speeding vehicle at location.
•Complainant on W. Main Street reported property damage.
•Complainant on W. Main Street reported an assault.
Sept. 22
•Report of political signs being stolen from location on N. Kniss Avenue.
•Report of political signs being stolen from location on W. Lincoln Street.
•Report of political signs being vandalized from location on N. Kniss Avenue.
•Report of a flag being stolen from location on S. East Park Street.
•Report of political signs being stolen from location on N. Estey Street.
•Extra patrol was requested at location on 61st Street.
•Theft was reported at location on W. Main Street.
•Suspicious activity was reported on W. Lincoln Street.
•A parking complaint was reported on E. Main Street, Hardwick.
•Complainant in Steen reported information on escaped inmate out of South Dakota.
•Complainant on 140th

Avenue, Steen, reported motor vehicle was stolen.
•Complainant on 140th Avenue, Steen, reported motor vehicle theft.
•Complainant at Touch the Sky Prairie reported vehicle parked at location for extended time.
Sept. 23
•Complainant on E. Main Street reported a found item may be related to Main Street vandalism.
•Complainant on 11th Street, Steen, reported theft.
•Complainant on 21st Street, Hills, reported theft.
•Warrant entry
•Complainant on Main Street, Hardwick, reported a vehicle is unsafe for driving.
•Subject on Sherman Street, Jackson, was arrested on Rock County warrant.
•Complainant on U.S. Highway 75 reported a fire at location.
Sept. 24
•Complainant on N. McKenzie Street, Luverne, reported a suspicious vehicle.
•Complainant westbound on Interstate 90, mile marker 13, Luverne, reported a possible assault.
•Report of salesman attempting to talk to farmers blocking the roadway on 21st Street and 120th Avenue, Steen.
•Complainant on N. Freeman Avenue reported theft.
•Complainant on 80th Avenue, Jasper, reported suspicious activity.
•Complainant on 71st Street and 40th Avenue, Beaver Creek, reported a suspicious vehicle.
Sept. 25
•Complainant westbound on Interstate 90, mile marker 10, Luverne, reported that she hit something on the roadway.
•Complainant westbound on Interstate 90, Luverne, reported debris on roadway and blew a tire.
•Complainant on S. East Park Street reported a deceased party.
•Complainant on Commerce Road reported an open door.
•Complainant on N. Freeman Avenue reported burglary.
•An accident was reported on S. Kniss Avenue.
•Assistance from another department was provided on Ahlers Avenue, Magnolia.
•An outage was reported at location.
•An accident was reported at location on S. Kniss Avenue.
•Complainant on E. Fairway Drive reported a scam.
•Complainant on S. Walnut Avenue reported a hazmat spill.
•Complainant on N. McKenzie Street reported a parking complaint.
•Complainant on Bark Avenue and Cedar Street reported a suspicious vehicle.
•Complainant on S. Kniss Avenue reported suspicious activity.
•Deputy reported an open storage unit on S. Kniss Avenue.
•Complainant on E. State Street, Magnolia, reported burglars in her shed.
In addition, officers responded to 2 motor vehicle accidents, 1 deer accident, 3 transports, 9 escorts, 19 ambulance runs, 4 paper services, 5 animal complaints, 3 fingerprint requests, 3 burn permits, 2 background checks, 1 gas drive-off, 6 alarms, 1 drug court test, 7 purchase and carry permits, 9 traffic stops, 6 abandoned 911 calls, 1 test, 3 welfare checks, 4 OFPs, 4 follow-ups.



Mavis Fodness photos/1001 Rock Ranch Open House

The five horse stalls provide a mud-free area for riders to view and to saddle their mounts prior to each session.

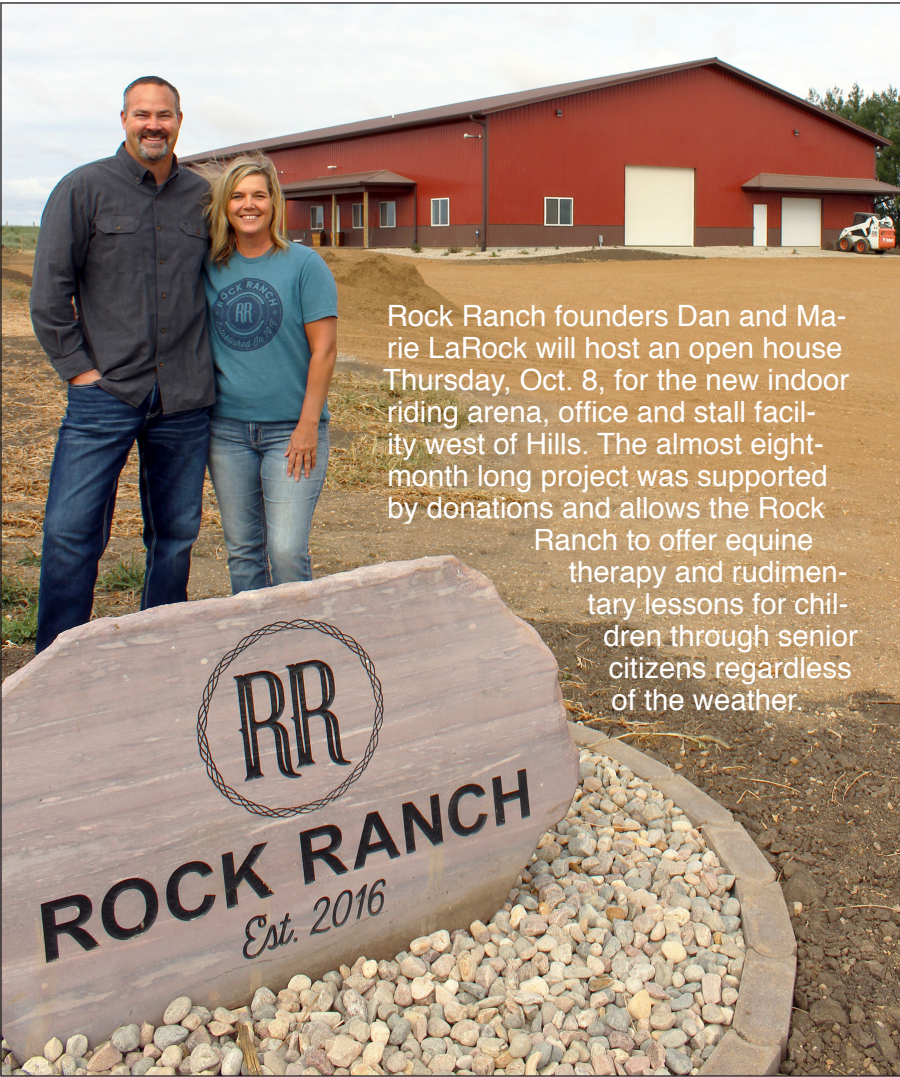
Rock Ranch open house set for Oct. 8/continued from page 1

to \$5,000.
“We couldn’t be more thankful to God for moving the hearts of so many to join us in this mission,” Dan said. “We are truly humbled to see His work come to fruition in the building of Rock Ranch arena.”
Four large pledges put the project on solid footing to start this spring.
The John and Tamme Berdahl family of Sioux Falls and the K.A.H.R. Foundation of Minnetrista combined to give \$250,000 to the project.
United Healthcare and the John and Susie Nelson family of Omaha had combined gifts of \$100,000.
Several local businesses and individuals provided materials and time to the arena project.
“We are simply so thrilled so many people and companies linked arms with Rock Ranch to fill this need,” Dan said.
“To be nearly 100 percent funded at this time, during this pandemic, is truly a gift from God and we intend to use that gift to the best of our abilities.”
Final costs place the area project at \$730,000, so about \$30,000 is needed to cover costs.
A private donor appreciation event will be prior to the public open house Thursday.

Pandemic halted some offerings
Senior Saddles didn’t meet this summer due to the coronavirus pandemic; however, the regular youth riding sessions continued.
Small classes met under social distancing conditions, riders were provided masks and all activities, including saddling and grooming, were completed outside.
“The vast majority of parents who brought their kids to lessons this summer shared with us just how grateful they felt that this activity ‘didn’t get canceled,’” Marie said.
“We hear frequently just how much these lessons mean to our riders.”



Along the east side of the arena a handicap-accessible viewing platform has been built for the ranch’s Senior Saddles and other therapy programs.



Rock Ranch founders Dan and Marie LaRock will host an open house Thursday, Oct. 8, for the new indoor riding arena, office and stall facility west of Hills. The almost eight-month long project was supported by donations and allows the Rock Ranch to offer equine therapy and rudimentary lessons for children through senior citizens regardless of the weather.


Fall classes filled
More young riders are excited for the fall sessions. Those youth who were placed on a “wait list” to participate in the summer introductory riding classes are now able to ride this fall.
Within a day, all the waiting riders from the summer sessions signed up for the RideRockRanch lessons, Marie said.
“We also received numerous requests each week for additional

lessons. We are adding several groups including a women’s riding group and a teenage riding group,” she added.
“We also have a number of individual lessons starting to take shape for riders who fall outside of the RideRockRanch age group — adults interested in riding and youth who are eager to improve their skills to a higher level.”
Also gaining in participant numbers is the Eagala counseling sessions. Eagala is an equine-therapy program and currently involves four part-time staff, which includes certified mental health professionals and equine specialists.
December will be a quiet month for riding at the Rock Ranch. The ranch’s board of directors has reserved the month to plan for 2021.
“We hope to incorporate several other kinds of groups who can also meet in our new conference area including Bible studies, 4-H, FFA, equine-related trainings, clinics and workshops,” Marie said.
Each new activity would need to meet the ranch’s original purpose to provide opportunities for persons to improve themselves physically, cognitively, socially and psychologically while learning the art and skills of horsemanship in a Christ-filled setting.
Rock Ranch was begun in 2016.

hills fire department relief association


PANCAKE SUPPER

Thursday Oct. 8 5 to 7 pm

**Hills American Legion**

FREE WILL DONATION

All you can eat



Fire Prevention Week


All proceeds go to the Hills Fire Department Relief Association

Community Food Drive

Please Help • Sunday, October 4th

All food must be placed on the front steps due to Covid-19. (No expired food)

Youth will be out to collect starting at 3 p.m.



Any one interested in helping collect is welcome.

Meet at Luverne United Methodist Church before 3 p.m. We need pickup and flatbeds.

Sponsored by Rock the Edge Youth Group

Blue Mound Figure Skaters

Learn to Skate!

OFFERING CLASSES FOR

Hockey Skating Fundamentals

Learn to Skate

Figure Skating

Classes are 30 minutes long for 10 weeks

OCTOBER 19 - December 21

at the Blue Mound Ice Arena

Tots, Hockey and Freestyle 1&2

Mondays between 5:00-6:30 p.m.

Freestyle 3 & UP

Monday's between 7:30-9:00 p.m.

REGISTER ONLINE!

www.bluemoundfigureskating.com

For more info you can call 712-540-9021 or 507-227-1999

