

APRIL 5, 2022



Elect  
**Betsy**  
Ellenberger  
Winnebago  
County Board  
District 7

"I understand the value of working together in a non-partisan way to achieve the county's goals of delivering services and programs while being fiscally responsible."

Paid for by Betsy Ellenberger for District 7

## County growth profile detailed

Neenah News

Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development (DWD) recently released data pertaining to state and county workforces in all industries.

"Every two years, DWD's Office of Economic Advisors compiles and distills local data on all 72 counties," the DWD said. "The snapshots have become an essential tool for economic development profes-

sionalists, regional planners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers, students and workers considering new employment opportunities."

The new profile on Wisconsin and specifically Winnebago County is an update from 2019 and overviews effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two years. In March 2020, the world shutting down for two months ended the longest economic ex-

pansion on record.

While Wisconsin's unemployment rate rose to nearly 15% at the start of the pandemic, it had returned to the state's historic lows by November 2021.

For Winnebago County, the population growth in the 2010s was attributed to both Neenah and Fox Crossing at 49.7%. Osh-

SEE **Workforce profile** ON PAGE 11

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Event held for former firefighter draws support  
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Photo by Luis Javier Valdes-Sanchez

### Downtown at dusk

Neenah's downtown area is seen last Saturday once the sky finally opened after days of rainy skies. A light trail of a vehicle is seen from the extended photo exposure. The windy cold night kept most passers-by off the streets.

## Each donation helps Hope Fridge win fight against food insecurity

By Cheryl Hentz  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

Food insecurity is a stark reality for many, and while there are options such as food pantries, those may not be of help for some individuals or families because they don't meet the income or other requirements. That's where Hope Fridge comes in.

The mutual aid network of community-sustained refrigerators provides free food for all. Through donations, contributions, crowdsourcing and community involvement, Hope Fridge puts fresh food directly into some Fox Valley neighborhoods. It is entirely volunteer run and community funded.

According to "Mutual Aid, Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And the Next)" by author Dean Spade, mutual aid is a "collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them."

"This system helps to catch some of the folks falling through the cracks at other systems, where there are a lot of forms to

fill out, or you have to meet certain income requirements, etc.," said TJ Hobbs, one of several co-founders of Hope Fridge.

Refrigerators are donated or purchased, then placed on properties of those who welcome the program. A wooden hut is built around the fridge to protect it from the elements and keep it from blowing over. Volunteers make or donate food to stock the fridge and those in need come and take what they need.

The group initially put out a feeler to see if anyone was willing to host a fridge. All of the founders rent, so were unable to put one on their lawns. They began getting some replies from folks who wanted to know more and were willing to host a fridge. The group's Facebook page started last April and two months later they had their first location in Neenah at 160 Curtis Ave.

The idea came about because the founders were inspired by other communities across the country that are doing similar things and are thriving. The Love Fridge in Chicago shared its build plans with Hope Fridge founders, who made their own creative tweaks. Hope Fridge has since shared those same plans with others in Wisconsin and even a group in Australia that's trying



Hobbs



Photo by Natalie Starr

A Hope Hygiene Hutch was dedicated at Neenah's Hope Fridge location in February thanks to the efforts of an Appleton Girl Scout troop.

SEE **Hope Fridge** ON PAGE 11

# Neenah News

Local news for you

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## County shuffles administrative posts

By Steve Clark  
OSHKOSH HERALD

A reshuffling of staff at the administrative level of Winnebago County has filled some key positions for now.

In moves that were made in middle to late February, Mike Collard is now serving as acting finance director, Carol Blackmore is the assistant finance director and Mark Habeck has filled Collard's former position and is acting human resource director, according to Ethan Hollenberger, the chief of staff for county executive Jon Doemel.

The moves stemmed from Vicky Fitzgerald's departure as finance director at the beginning of the year. Collard, who had been the county's director of human resources, took on the finance director's position on an interim basis while the county conducted a search for a new director.

With no viable candidates coming to the forefront, the decision was made to move Collard to acting finance director to put him in the position full time.

"We had a retirement and some other things that were planned and Mike just

said he could go over (to Finance) full time," Hollenberger said. "We were able to move Mike over into a full-time basis and that helped us to have full-time support."

Hollenberger noted that Doemel has not appointed either Collard or Habeck



Collard

to their respective positions as both would have to be sanctioned by County Board of Supervisors approval. However, the administrative staff will look like this moving forward.

The county is also still shopping for a full-time finance director which, if hired, would move Collard and Habeck back to their original positions. For now, with Collard leading the way and having Blackmore in her new role, the county has the needed pieces in place. Blackmore was promoted from budget manager after more than 20 years working for the county.

"Mike is reviewing some practices and procedures to get a grasp of ways we can improve with Carol who has been in the department 20 years," Hollenberger said. "We are still hopeful and will recruit for a finance director. We want to get that hire right, but I think Mike's goal is to provide some continuity for a while."

Having some continuity at those positions was an important factor heading into the upcoming elections where the board is likely to experience heavy turnover.

"I think that was part of the logic," Hollenberger said. "We knew we were heading to this board transition, and we wanted to make sure we had (some stability)."

Hollenberger credited Collard's versatility and range of knowledge to make these moves possible.

"Mike is still advising and has his fingers dipping into HR in an advising role," Hollenberger said. "A lot of counties have a role for someone who can cover all of administration duties and I think Mike does cover that for us. That's the strength of Mike Collard."

## State 76 rebuild earns Wisconsin DOT highway design award

The highway rehabilitation work on State 76 in Winnebago County was among the Department of Transportation's selections for a 2022 Excellence in Highway Design Award.

MSA Professional Services received the Consultant Rural Design Award for the work nominated by the DOT Northeast Region office.

The project transformed a 3.5-mile section of roadway between Oshkosh and Greenville to deal with pavement and

drainage deficiencies, safety and operational performance for vehicle and large-truck commercial traffic. The solution rehabilitated the roadway surface and involved construction of roundabouts at three major intersections to minimize accidents and resolve efficiency concerns.

The project also widened shoulders along the entire stretch of roadway, up-sized culverts, added storm sewer and pipe underdrain, and installed truck aprons at some overrun areas of the roundabouts to

accommodate turning movements of large trucks and oversize, overweight vehicles.

The work also accommodated the local fire department and property owners and mitigated impacts to adjacent wetland areas.

## Correction

**MARCH 25, PAGE 3:** In a story about Neenah mayoral candidates, Brian Borchardt has been a council member since 2020, not 2019.



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- Neenah Arts Council
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former Mayor of Neenah (2002-2014)

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- MARIEN CARPENTER,  
former Mayor of Neenah (1982-1998)

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Neenah News photo

Neenah Paper and Schweitzer-Mauduit International announced a merger between the two manufacturers of specialty materials on Monday.

## Neenah Paper, SWM merge

Neenah News

Neenah Paper and Schweitzer-Mauduit International (SWM), two leading global manufacturers of specialty materials, announced an agreement Monday to combine in an all-stock merger with revenues of about \$3 billion.

Under the terms of the agreement, unanimously approved by the boards of directors of both companies, shareholders of Neenah will receive 1.358 shares of SWM common stock for each share of Neenah common stock owned. After the transaction is closed, SWM shareholders will own about 58% of the combined company.

Neenah Paper was founded in 1873 and its mill at 135 N. Commercial St. is the oldest continuously operating business within Neenah Inc., the parent company based in Alpharetta, Ga.

The announcement said the transaction brings together two organizations with complementary technologies, geog-

raphies and product portfolios, and will bring strong positions in large, growing categories including filtration, healthcare and wellness, protective and adhesive solutions, industrial solutions, and packaging and specialty paper.

“This combination is a unique opportunity to accelerate our growth strategy and continue the transformation of our business, creating a global leader in specialty materials with strong and defensible positions in attractive end-markets,” said Julie Schertell, president and chief executive officer of Neenah, in a statement. “The synergy potential for this transaction is significant, and the all-stock structure enables shareholders of both companies to participate in the substantial value creation and future growth opportunities of the combined company.

“SWM has a talented team that shares our values, with a focus on employee safety, innovation and customer intimacy.”

## Ellenberger, Fahrenkrug vie for County Board seat

By Steve Clark  
NEENAH NEWS

There is only one contested race for the County Board of Supervisors in Neenah and it involves a pair of newcomers to county government.

Betsy Ellenberger and Kelly Fahrenkrug will be on the ballot and vying for the seat in District 7, which is being vacated by Steven Lenz, who has served since 2018.

The two candidates bring different backgrounds to the race, but a share a common goal in wanting to make an impact on the community they will represent and are hoping to get that opportunity with a seat on the board.

“I want to give back. This is really my favorite place in the whole world and I want to make sure this remains a good place to live for many years,” said Fahrenkrug, who has lived in Winnebago County and Neenah for most of her life. “I’m not running because I don’t like it or I think it’s broken or anything like that. We have so much more we can do and let’s make sure we are positioned for the future.”

Ellenberger served 12 years on the Neenah Board of Education but opted not to run for a fourth term to care for her aging parents.

Now, she’s ready to return in serving her community and decided that the county board would give her the best opportunity to do that.

“I wanted to continue to have an impact on local issues,” Ellenberger said. “I had to step away from public service for a few years, but I really want to get involved again. I enjoy it. I decided to run for coun-

ty board so I can have more of an impact.”

Ellenberger said one of her biggest concerns is making sure the county stays within the confines of its budget and remain fiscally responsible. It’s a challenge she experienced as a member of the school board and understands the importance of working with the other supervisors to do it at the county level.

“That’s always the biggest obstacle when you are working in government. You have to work within the confines of the budget,” Ellenberger said. “You have to be able to negotiate and everyone is coming from a different place. What helps us in my district may be different than what downtown Oshkosh needs. You have to open your minds and listen to all of the needs before you make decisions.”

Through her campaigning and preparing for this run for the board, Fahrenkrug believes that staffing is a key issue facing the supervisors moving forward.

“I think unanimously the biggest concern is staffing. We are hearing that in the private sector, and we are hearing that in the government,” Fahrenkrug said. “We can’t leave Highway 41 unplowed. We have to make sure we have people out there. We can’t leave our prison understaffed or our sheriff’s office understaffed. ... People are concerned that they can’t get the services that they are entitled to from the government. We need to be sure that we are attracting people here and retaining the staff we have. Make the county a place they want to work and we have to attract new workers and make sure that we are minimizing any disruptions.”

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# Firefighter benefit teams up to support Fahrenkrugs

By AJ Mikkelson  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

Firefighting is often called a brotherhood. Many firefighters consider their co-workers brothers and sisters.

Most career fire departments work 24-hour shifts and the bonds of trust required to perform their duties are as strong as family. Some compare these bonds to those built while serving in the military. As a result, it is not uncommon to find multiple members of one family serving as career firefighters.

In the history of the Neenah Fire Department and now Neenah-Menasha Fire Rescue, only one family has had three generations of firefighters. Bill Fahrenkrug was originally hired in 1965. His son,

Mark, was hired by the department in 1993. In 2015, Mark's son, Ben, was hired by Neenah Menasha Fire Rescue.

This made the Fahrenkrugs the first three-generation family to serve Neenah. Bill has another son, Pete, who was hired by the Oshkosh Fire Department as a firefighter/paramedic in 1994 after serving in the U.S. Army for 11 years.

Pete Fahrenkrug retired from the Oshkosh department in 2021. In January 2022, he was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer that has metastasized to his liver.

Fahrenkrug is a married father of six children and 11 grandchildren. After a lifetime of service to others, his family is "determined to provide the support Pete



A.J. Mikkelson photo

A benefit held at the Old 41 Saloon last Saturday supported retired firefighter Pete Fahrenkrug, who was recently diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

donated, custom T-shirts were sold and the event raised more than \$21,000 to support the Fahrenkrugs.

"My whole life is flashing before my eyes, seeing all the people here that have been in my life from childhood to now," Fahrenkrug told the crowd, adding that seeing the colleagues, friends and family come together was more important than the funds raised.

He said the event's positive vibe was good for the entire family.

Fahrenkrug's family says he is their rock and is always looking for the positive in everything. The tight-knit group is facing this challenge the same way firefighters face any challenge – as a team.

The impact Fahrenkrug has had on others was on display at the benefit by the community family that showed up to support him.

Pete is considered a family member of both departments with a bond that binds them. Both departments will continue that support through the Oshkosh Firefighters Charitable Trust.

and his family need during this critical time of illness, treatment and recovery."

Last Saturday, a benefit was held at the Old 41 Saloon on Green Bay Road. The turnout was high with about 300 people attending, including many Oshkosh and Neenah-Menasha firefighters.

There were more than 60 gift baskets

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Club of Neenah Wisconsin

# Donor recognition, sponsorship policy reviewed ahead of projects

Neenah News

An updated policy for sponsorships and naming rights as school district building projects are underway establishes how some donations will be turned into different forms of recognition.

The Neenah Joint School District Board of Education last month approved a plan advanced by the Finance and Personnel Committee that details how gifts, grants and bequests are accepted along with how donations will have "sunset clauses" where the naming or recognition will expire after a set number of years.

Current naming sponsorships are most notably found on the Rocket Stadium scoreboard and at Ron Einerson Fieldhouse in addition to other spaces and buildings named for individuals, organizations and businesses. The building referendum approved in April 2020 will bring a new set of naming opportunities at the new high school under construction and renovations to what will become Neenah Middle School.

There will be time limits on how long something can be named to provide opportunities for other sponsors. The video scoreboard sponsorship, for example, is a five-year period.

Common name recognition locations are on benches, outdoor landscaping areas,

gates and entrances, while other possibilities will be considered. There is also a Wall of Gratitude for donors that has no sunset limit.

"Current sponsors will be given first priority as we consider sponsorship and naming rights," Superintendent Mary Pfeiffer and chief financial officer Jonathan Joch stated in a letter to the board. "Given the list of new opportunities, it is likely that there will be opportunities for additional participants."

Donations up to \$5,000 require building administrator approval, those \$5,000-\$25,000 need approval by a district administrator and any advertising or sponsorship above \$50,000 would need board approval.

"Acceptance of such gifts shall not be considered to be a testimonial or endorsement of a particular brand or product," the policy states in part, and the district retains the right to decline any gift or donation.

District administrators said they will soon prioritize where donation and sponsorship revenue will be used, such as academics, athletics, performing arts or technology.

In other action, end-of-year resignations were approved for Hoover Principal Lexi Foerster, Tullar and Taft teacher Cynthia Rosenbluh, Tullar teacher Allison Thompson, high school counselor Natalie Shea and high school teacher Katie Buettner.

## Shining Star Awards honor city teachers

The Fox Cities Chamber announced its 2022 Excellence in Education Shining Star Awards last week. Jan Koshalek, a teacher at Tullar Elementary School in Neenah, received the Inclusive Excellence in Education Award.

Among the four Educator of the Year 2022 finalists was Neenah High School instructor Scott Hertting.

The honorees were selected by a volunteer panel of Fox Cities education professionals.



Submitted photo

The Shattuck Middle School robotics team placed first in a state competition held last month.

## Shattuck robotics team qualifies for worlds

A team of Shattuck Middle School students won first place in the teamwork competition at the Wisconsin State VEX IQ Robotics Competition in Appleton last month.

They earned the right to compete for the VEX IQ World Robotic Competition May 8-10 in Dallas.

The team of Jack DeMenter, Simon Galvin, Jack Henry and Nina Bhattacharjee set a new state record score of 154 points. They also were awarded the Build Award for their robot that effectively and consistently scored points. They were one of a record five teams from Shattuck that qualified for the state tournament.

The teams are coached by Brian Schalliol and Adam Hendries.

The top team's finals performance can be viewed on YouTube by searching 2022 WI VIQC MS State Championship.

A Neenah High School team of Lexi Dorner, Myah Wenzel, Bridger Wenzel and Julia Rangel finished with the sixth

highest programming score in the state. The team of Asher Brotherton, Nate Brotherton, Aiden Colby, Aidan Leon, Ian Erickson, Carson Erbrecht-Willard and Connor McNulty finished with a 6-4 record, while the team of Quinn Smith, Dominic Young, Michael Printz and Eduardo Rangel finished 4-6.

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# Private garden space draws butterflies, birds naturally

By Rob Zimmer  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

The many gardens of Neenah gardener Mary Stewart are a haven for monarch butterflies, songbirds and hummingbirds throughout the year. Stewart is dedicated to gardening without using pesticides of any kind, relying upon Mother Nature, as well as her fine gardening skills, to keep the gardens looking beautiful.

Taking pride in filling her garden vignettes with native wildflowers and plants – as well as important nectar and pollinator plants for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and more – Stewart has seen the rewards of her efforts firsthand.

“Listening to the birds each morning as they sing in the garden is magical,” Stewart said. “Every morning in summer I search for monarch caterpillars on the milkweeds and it is always such a joy to see a monarch enjoying my native plants.”

For a small urban city lot, Stewart’s gar-

## The Neenah GARDENER

dens are a haven for birds and butterflies and other wildlife, something she treasures and dedicates her time and efforts to.

“Gardening has been a passion for half a century. My love for nature began as a child,” she said. Raised in Alabama, Stewart moved to Wisconsin in 1961. “I remember making trips to the garden with Dad to weed and stake poles for green beans, water half an acre by hand. He taught me so many things.”

“Fast forward to my humble abode. No chemicals are used, I am pesticide free. We need bees and insects to survive. A sea of yellow dandelions are welcome here.”

That doesn’t mean she doesn’t have a little fun along the way. An expert gardener, Stewart has created small garden vignettes all around her home, placing unexpected treasures among the plants and container



Photos by Rob Zimmer

Some of the flowers and plants on display at Mary Stewart’s home.



gardens.

You never know what you’ll find tucked into her garden beds and borders. Decorative rock specimens, wicker baskets, a handmade twig trellis, bird baths, bird houses, bird feeders and vintage garden art.

Each side of the house has been divided into its own garden treasure. There is the north garden, the south garden, the porch garden and more. In each area, Stewart has included plants and shrubs that grow best in those light and moisture conditions.

“My goal this year is to include even more native plants,” Stewart said. “More milkweed for monarchs, more wildflowers for hummingbirds and other butterflies. It’s all natural for me.”

“Over the past few years, some native perennials were planted in the ground, others were planted in containers. The

difference in including native plants is like night and day. I’ve noticed a huge variety of bees, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, damselfly, toads and frogs.”

Stewart looks forward to creating another paradise of colorful containers, as well as beds and borders filled with the beauty of wildflowers this season.

## UW Extension mapping community gardens

The University of Wisconsin Extension for Winnebago and Outagamie counties is collecting information and mapping out community gardens in the Fox Valley area.

The project, coordinated by community development educator Mia Ljung, is in its second year.

“The need for community gardens serves many purposes in our communities, such as food safety, social interaction, beautification and increased neighborhood safety,” Ljung said. “After receiving many phone calls from residents about community garden availability, the Extension is hoping that finding community garden spaces will be easier using this

Community Gardens map, while also providing a better understanding of where more gardens may be needed in future community efforts.”

This map is available as a public directory for residents to find garden spaces. The Extension is not providing garden coordination services with the exception of the Sunnyview Garden Partnership. The map can be found at [outagamie.extension.wisc.edu](http://outagamie.extension.wisc.edu) or on the Extension Winnebago website.

Anyone wishing to add a community garden to the map or needs to change existing information should contact 920-232-1974 or fill out the form on their website.

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Submitted photo

The 13th annual Kitchen Tour will showcase the kitchens at five houses on its April 28 trek.

# Annual kitchen tour helps support Emergency Society

The Neenah-Menasha Emergency Society is hosting its 13th annual Kitchen Tour from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. April 28 that showcases five kitchens in southeast Neenah.

The event is the organization's largest annual fundraising event to provide emergency resources to support those unable to provide for their core needs. Funds raised by the tour support programs such as the Back to School Fair, Keeping Kids Warm, Emergency Assistance and Meals on Wheels.

A mix of newly constructed homes and innovatively renovated kitchens featuring styles from Classic European Chateau, Modern Farmhouse, Modern Prairie Style


Lake Home, Craftsman Bungalow and Classic Colonial will be shown.

Demonstrations and tastings from local businesses will be featured as well, including a food truck rally at Shattuck Park that will be open to the public and to ticket holders from noon to 6 p.m.

"We are incredibly appreciative to the homeowners for opening their doors to us and allowing us to continue the tradition of the kitchen tour," co-event chair Leslie Mayer said.

For more information, visit nmesociety.org. Tickets will also be available for \$30 at several locations in the Fox Valley and in-person the day of the event for \$35.





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Check out all the events for March 28 to April 30 at [uwo.sh/earth-month](http://uwo.sh/earth-month).



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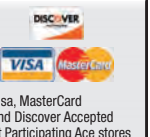
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## Public Library calendar

(Go to [neenahlibrary.org](http://neenahlibrary.org) or call 920-886-6315 for details or registration information.)

### Friday, April 1

Ced Ba'etch' in concert, 2 p.m.

### Monday, April 4

The Green Armoire – Repurposing Junk, 2 p.m.

## County sets mock tornado drill as part of awareness week

Winnebago County will test its outdoor warning sirens Thursday during participation in two planned statewide tornado drills.

The Wisconsin 2022 Tornado and Severe Weather Awareness week campaign runs April 4-8. April 8 is the backup date for the statewide drill in the event of severe weather.

### Thursday, April 7

Ukulele Open Jam, 6 p.m. Bring music, play for the group or with fellow ukers. All skill levels.

Open Chess Night, 6 p.m. All ages and skill levels.

### Friday, April 8

Yoga After Dark, 6:30 p.m.

At 1:45 p.m. the National Weather Service will issue a mock tornado warning that will last 15 minutes. Then at 6:45 p.m. it will issue a mock warning for all of Wisconsin that ends at 7 p.m.

Drills no longer include a live EAS test and mock tornado watch/warning issued by the National Weather Service.

## Zernzach named Tullar principal

Tullar Elementary School will have a new principal as Amber Zernzach has been hired to the position. Zernzach replaces Diane Galow, who is retiring after leading Neenah's largest elementary school for 21 years.

The hire was approved by the Board of Education at its most recent meeting.

Zernzach served as principal at Rosendale-Brandon Elementary School this past year. She previously worked three years as a literacy coach and reading interventionist at Webster Stanley Elementary School in Oshkosh and taught fifth grade for a year at Roosevelt Elementary School in Oshkosh. She began her career



Zernzach

by teaching five years at Winneconne Elementary School.

"Amber will be well positioned at Tullar. She has high expectations for all students while at the same time, ensuring that students have fun and enjoy learning every day," said Superintendent Mary Pfeiffer. "She is looking forward to becoming a member of the Tullar community and shared how impressed she was with the staff and their love for children."

Zernzach has a degree in elementary education from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and a master's in education from UW-Stout.

Tullar has three classes at each grade level and an enrollment of 411 students for this school year.

# Calendar of events

### Ongoing

Downtown Neenah Spring Scavenger Hunt through April 14

### Friday, April 1

First Friday concert, Ced Ba'etch', 2 p.m., Neenah Public Library

Uncorked and Uncapped, 7 p.m., Best Western Premier Bridgewood

### Saturday, April 2

History's Mysteries & Martinis, 6 p.m., Kessler Funeral Home, 304 S. Commercial St.

Art Activity Day, 10 a.m., Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass

### Thursday, April 7

Pat McCurdy, 7 p.m., Bee Hive Barn and Grill, 2925 County G

### Saturday, April 9

Brews with the Bunny, 5 p.m.; Easter Egg Hunt, 7:45 p.m., Fritsch Park, Fox Crossing

"The Gospel of Life at the End of Life," 8 a.m., St. Mary Catholic High School

### Tuesday, April 12

Discover Class: Dungeons and Dragons (grades 8-12), 6 p.m., The Brigade, 109 W. Columbian Ave.

### Wednesday, April 13

Fox Valley Women's Connection Lunch, noon, Ridgeway Country Club

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# Rockets looking to continue their climb in FVA

By Dustin Riese  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

Over the past several seasons, the Neenah Rockets baseball team has gone through what coaches like to call a retooling process. After a coaching change several seasons ago that saw Jack Taschner take over, it took a while for the Rockets to get back to their winning ways. Add in a lost 2020 season and things were frustrating to say the least.

Enter 2021, when things started to get back to normal and all the hard work from

## BASEBALL PREVIEW

years past paid off. The Rockets finished with a 12-6 mark in FVA play and 15-9 overall.

When you look at how things were in the years prior, this was a dramatic improvement and one that had the Rockets feeling good.

“Last year it was great to get back out and play,” Taschner said. “The schedule was tight with it getting pushed back, but I thought we responded well. We had strong senior leadership, which always helps in unique situations.”

Fast forward to 2022 and pandemic precautions are no longer tight while some are still in place. Also add in a normal off-season with players and coaches alike knowing exactly how practice would go and when things would get rolling.

It is all about building off that success, which is something Taschner and his staff are focusing on.

“We are definitely looking to build,” he said. “It was a great start to that process. With the strong returning senior class and a great mix of young talent, I truly believe

we can make another run toward a conference title. Neenah hasn’t won a conference title since 1976. We need to change that.”

Replacing Chase Hanselman at shortstop, Jaden Hackbarth at third base, Brady Frost at first and Payton McCowry in the outfield will be tough as they were part of a great senior class. But Neenah has plenty of young talent and another great senior class capable of making some noise.

Look no further than FVA player of the year Gradin Taschner, who will anchor the lineup. Payton Miller will make a big impact in his sophomore year. Eli Schmidt and Carter Thomas are coming off a state basketball championship and will provide a lot for the team.

Jaeden Carstens was a first-team all-FVA pitcher who will anchor the staff with Beckett Davidson and Thomas following.

As expected, Kimberly and Hortonville have cemented themselves as the favorites again, but don’t count out teams like Oshkosh North or Neenah. Both of those programs made huge strides last year and look to take it to the next level.

“We need to do the little things,” Taschner said. “I try to stress with the boys that the little things set the base for the big opportunities to be there.”

The Rockets opened their season Thursday against Fox Valley Lutheran before welcoming Hortonville to town for their FVA opener Tuesday.

## Zephyrs back in action with new leader

St. Mary Catholic baseball has had a rich tradition of success on and off the field. That continued in 2021 with the

Zephyrs finishing fourth in the Big East conference with an 8-4 overall mark and 14-7 for the season. Their season came to an end against Amherst in the postseason.

This season will look a little different as first-year head coach Jeff Hogenson is taking over a historic program coming off a strong year. Hogenson is no stranger to the success of this program and wants to continue that tradition and hopes the hard work his players are putting in pays off.

“The St. Mary Catholic baseball program has a long tradition of success and has been led by some incredible leaders that have laid a strong foundation, which will allow our current coaching staff to continue building upon it,” Hogenson said. “I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to coach at a school which provides such unwavering support for their students, their academics, the facilities and their athletic programs.”

Hall of fame coach Phil Janssen ended his tenure with the program and the Zephyrs have three significant holes to fill. Mitch Lukaik and Ben Wilson were seniors who have now gone on to play for Ripon College. Starting catcher Ethan Collins also graduated. Lukaik and Wilson combined for 103 of the team’s 137 innings pitched and started 17 of the 21 games.

There is still plenty of talent remaining and that is a big reason why this is a top 15 team in Division 3. On the offensive side, Daniel Decker is a senior shortstop committed to play at Milwaukee Area Tech next year, and will be counted on to lead the way.

Fisher Mackenzie, a sophomore trans-

fer from Lourdes Academy, will also supply much-needed offense. Noah Bublitz, Caden Akey, George Albers and Owen Ripley, all returning starters, are going to be solid offensive contributors.

Seniors Daniel Decker, Caden Akey and George Albers, juniors Owen Ripley and Matt Betchner, and sophomores Mackenzie and Aidan Birling will all contribute meaningful innings on the mound.

Hogenson said freshman Joe Pirillo is another young pitcher with a great deal of upside remaining to develop as he focuses most of his time at the JV level.

Being part of the Big East conference is never easy, but the Zephyrs appear poised to contend for the league title. SMC is predicted to finish as conference runners-up with Random Lake appearing as the favorites right now.

Howards Grove and Reedsville are two other teams that make this league a nightmare to navigate, but does prepare teams for what is to come.

Hogenson is excited to begin his journey as coach and feels his team has the talent to make this a special year.

“2022 will be both an exciting and interesting year for the Zephyrs,” he said. “We will be displaced from our home field until likely sometime in mid-May as our turf field is completed, which will make practicing between now and then much more challenging.”

“When our new field is completed there will be a sign on the gate to the field that will read, ‘When you step on this field, Be The Best You, for your teammates.’ If we can all buy in to that, the players will have a successful season on the field as well as in life.”



# 2022 Baseball & Softball schedules

## Neenah & St. Mary Catholic High Schools

NEENAH HIGH SCHOOL 			ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL 		
BOYS			BOYS		
Apr 5	Hortonville	4:30pm	Apr 7	Howards Grove	4:30pm*
Apr 7	Oshkosh West	4:30pm	Apr 12	Xavier	4:30pm*
Apr 12	Appleton North	4:30pm	Apr 14	Reedsville	4:30pm*
Apr 14	Kimberly	4:30pm	Apr 19	@Oostburg	4:30pm
Apr 19	Appleton East	4:30pm	Apr 21	Michicot	4:30pm*
Apr 21	Oshkosh North	5:00pm	Apr 26	@Manitowoc Lutheran	4:30pm
Apr 26	Fond du Lac	4:30pm	May 2	@Hilbert/Stockbridge	4:30pm
Apr 28	Kaukauna	4:30pm	May 3	Kohler	4:30pm
May 3	Appleton West	5:00pm	May 5	Cedar Grove-Belgium	4:30pm
May 5	Hortonville	5:00pm	May 7	Valders	4:30pm
May 6	Oshkosh West	4:30pm	May 10	@Random Lake	4:30pm
May 10	Appleton North	4:30pm	May 12	Ozaukee	4:30pm
May 12	Kimberly	4:30pm	May 16	Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah	4:30pm
May 13	Appleton East	4:30pm	May 19	@Sheboygan Area Lutheran	4:30pm
May 17	Oshkosh North	4:30pm	May 21	@Winneconne	10:00am
May 19	Fond du Lac	4:30pm	May 23	@Lourdes Academy	5:00pm
May 24	Kaukauna	4:30pm			
May 26	Appleton West	4:30pm			

NEENAH HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS

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ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

BOYS

Home games with \* at Mahler Park; all others at  
St. Mary Catholic baseball field.

NEENAH HIGH SCHOOL 			ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL 		
GIRLS			GIRLS		
Apr 5	Hortonville	4:30pm	Apr 4	Iola-Scandinavia	4:30pm*
Apr 7	Oshkosh West	4:30pm	Apr 5	@Manawa	4:30pm
Apr 12	Appleton North	4:30pm	Apr 7	Howards Grove	4:00pm
Apr 14	Kimberly	4:30pm	Apr 12	@Sheboygan Area Lutheran	4:30pm
Apr 19	Appleton East	4:30pm	Apr 14	Reedsville	4:30pm*
Apr 21	Oshkosh North	4:30pm	Apr 19	@Oostburg	4:30pm
Apr 22	Fond du Lac	4:30pm	Apr 21	Michicot	4:30pm*
Apr 26	Kaukauna	4:30pm	Apr 23	@Xavier	4:30pm
Apr 28	Appleton West	5:00pm	Apr 26	@Manitowoc Lutheran	4:30pm
Apr 29	Hortonville	4:30pm	Apr 28	@Lourdes Academy	5:00pm
May 3	Oshkosh West	4:30pm	May 2	@Hilbert/Stockbridge	5:00pm
May 5	Appleton North	4:30pm	May 3	Elkhart Lake-Glenbeulah	4:30pm
May 6	Kimberly	4:30pm	May 5	Cedar Grove-Belgium	4:30pm
May 10	Appleton East	4:30pm	May 10	@Random Lake	4:30pm
May 12	Oshkosh North	4:30pm	May 12	Ozaukee	4:30pm
May 13	Fond du Lac	5:00pm	May 14	@Fox Valley Lutheran	10:00am
May 17	Kaukauna	4:30pm	May 17	@Roncalli	4:30pm
May 19	Appleton West	4:30pm			

\*All schedules and locations are subject to change. Please check schools website for updates.



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# Rockets softball looking to build off 2021 campaign

By Dustin Riese  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

When COVID forced the cancellation of the 2020 spring season, no one knew what would come next. For the coaches, it was more of a waiting game as they were trying to figure out something for the kids to do. For the athletes, it became a yearlong individual workout session as they had to figure how to stay in game shape while facing the reality of not having a season.

After nearly a year of waiting, it was the beginning of what was a great season as the Rockets finished the year 18-9 overall, 12-6 in Fox Valley Association play and saw their season come to an end against conference rival Oshkosh West in the sectional semifinal.

“Last season was so much fun,” head coach Steven Gross said. “Obviously with the COVID shutdown in 2020, it was great to be back out on the field with the amazing group of kids we had for the season. Last year was a unique group of seniors for us. They unfortunately didn’t get much playing time, but they brought something you can’t coach. They were phenomenal teammates! They took opportunities when they were given them,

but they were what genuinely kept us together as a program.”

The seniors they had last season didn’t see the field a ton, which means Neenah had not only a younger team, but plenty of talent coming back. That is a scary thing to think about for the rest of the FVA, especially when they won 12 games in conference a season ago.

“One of our goals as we talk with our team every year is to come and get better every time we set foot on the field,” Gross said. “We were a young team last year and at times it showed. This year we have a ton of experience returning, so expectations are higher not only from us as a coaching staff toward the girls, but the girls have high expectations for themselves. Our goal is to have a better record than we did last year, but to also make it deeper into the playoffs than we did as well.”

For the Rockets to be successful once again, look for Madie Jagoditsh to be the leader. She plays first base and was the lead-off hitter – setting the table for the rest of the team as she led the Rockets in batting average to go with first-team all-conference honors.

Jagoditsh won’t be alone as Savanna Knuth, Piper Alberg, Quinn Marnocha, and McKenna Herm all played well and are likely to take on bigger roles.

Neenah is also fortunate to have highly talented underclassmen and that falls on Parker Zipperer, Taelyn Bauer and Bella Coulman. That group brings an insane amount of energy to the diamond, and they continue to step up their game.

Given that the FVA is such a tough conference top to bottom, it takes an entire team effort to come out on top. Kaukauna, Kimberly, Oshkosh West, Hortonville and Neenah are considered the top programs where any of those five teams can bring home the crown.

Don’t count out Oshkosh North as they return one of the best pitchers in the conference and that alone will help.

“I think consistency is going to be huge for us,” Gross said. “Continuing to show up and compete not only with teams but ourselves to continue to get better is going to be key. I think our energy is great and we just need to continue to carry that throughout the season.”

The Rockets began their season March 29 with a nonconference game at Freedom before welcoming Hortonville on April 5 for the FVA opener.

knew his squad was going to be young. Because of that, there were bumps along the way going 6-12 overall, but competing in the tough Big East conference for a 5-6 conference mark.

The wins and losses were not a concern for him as last season was more of a developmental year.

“Going into the 2021 season, we were a very young and inexperienced team,” Gullickson said. “We had many girls that started our 2019 season having never played softball before. Losing the 2020 season had us starting over in the development of those players.”

Although this will still be a young team, that year of development will be huge for the Zephyrs program. Losing 2020 was tough but getting on the field last season was a crucial time for this program as they were able to hit the field to learn and improve their overall skill.

Gullickson knows his team is still a work in progress and understands the difficulty having a young team brings.

“Going into this season we wanted to keep the goals simple and attainable,” he said. “We talked with the girls about taking the season one day at a time. Every day is a new opportunity to improve from the day before. We do that and we will be a much better team at the end of the season.”

## Zephyrs bring back more experience

Heading into the 2021 softball season, head softball coach Brian Gullickson

## SOFTBALL PREVIEW

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# Hope Fridge

FROM PAGE 1

to start a project.

“We’re empowering anyone who contacts us to do it because it’s so needed,” said Hobbs, who after moving here for college was struggling financially, something that can easily affect one’s emotional, physical and mental health. “I couldn’t afford to live my life, and I would’ve loved a place like this when I was struggling. I’ll never forget how horrible it felt to be working two jobs – 15 hours some days – and still not making it.”

Two main principles guide Hope Fridge: Everyone deserves to know where their next meal is coming from; and people in need know best what they need.

Sandwiches are popular items to stock, especially for people who don’t have homes.

“Other meals might need to be cooked in a stove or heated up in a microwave, but if you don’t have a home, you can’t do that,” Hobbs said.

Many other food items are welcomed.

“We just ask that people prepare food for us like they would for a friend or a loved one. We encourage gloves and hairnets be used, and hand-washing and other basic hygiene be practiced if people are preparing food items for us,” Hobbs said. “We also ask that donations be individually packaged and labeled with all ingredients used and the date the meal was prepared. That’s for safety reasons, especially if someone getting the meals has food allergies and so we don’t have food sitting there longer than two or three days; though in reality, the food rarely sits in a fridge longer than a couple hours.”

Certain household goods are also collected and a list of those along with the kinds of food or meals they need is at HopeFridge.

com/guidelines.

A ribbon-cutting and unveiling of Neenah’s first Hope Fridge Hygiene Hutch took place in February. This idea was conceptualized and constructed by Girl Scout Troop 2032 from Appleton. Natalie Starr, a troop leader said, “The girls came up with the idea on their own. I and our other troop leader just let them run with it. The girls bought the lumber themselves, assembled it themselves and painted it themselves.”

The Hygiene Hutch is right next to the Hope Fridge. Items that can be donated to the “hutch” include feminine hygiene products, oral health products, deodorant, wet wipes and body/hand soaps (including liquid soaps). No aerosol products are accepted.

“We are beyond proud of the dedication and teamwork the girls have shown, and so grateful for their compassion toward the betterment of our community,” Hobbs said, adding that at some point, they may explore the possibility of a Hygiene Hutch at every fridge location. For now, if someone wants to donate such items, they can just leave them adjacent to the fridge.

Starr offered this piece of advice: “They shouldn’t always be concerned about thinking big. Instead, think little because it’s the little things that help the community. And if everyone does a little something, the results can be huge.”

With two locations in Oshkosh and one in Neenah, founders are always looking for more sites, and this summer hope to expand into Appleton. But they want to grow at a rate that’s sustainable.

“We also have some work to do to expand our Neenah location to include a community garden, a brick walkway and a little fence to kindly remind folks to please not park in the driveway of the residence when visiting,” Hobbs said.

For more information, visit HopeFridge.com.

# Workforce profile

FROM PAGE 1

osh, on the other hand, accounted for only 17.9% of the growth in the last decade.

Over the course of 2020 alone, employment in the county decreased by nearly 3,700 jobs across all industries, according to the DWD profile. With this, employment in the county’s three largest industries – education and health services, manufacturing and trade, transportation and utilities – declined by 1,800 jobs in 2020.

“The most rapid rebound occurred in the spring and early summer of 2020, but the following winter experienced more employment declines than normal in the midst of a new COVID wave at the time,” the workforce profile reads. “As of June 2021, Winnebago County recovered nearly 93% of those lost jobs.”

Though future surges of COVID pose a possible threat to continuing economic growth in the state and in Winnebago County, there are also continuing oversights of people in the baby boomer generation retiring and continuing to leave the workforce in great capacity.

“The number of retiring baby boomers

nearly matches the influx of new workers, resulting in a slow-growing workforce and placing constraints on the ability of employers across industries to secure talent,” the workforce profile reads. “Many businesses report that the lack of available workers has hindered expansion, and in some cases, even curtailed the ability to meet current business needs.”

With this, the DWD suggested four possible solutions to the macroeconomic labor equality challenge, including offshoring production, hiring immigrants, mitigating barriers to employment of the chronically unemployed, and advancing today’s technology.

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# Neenah News

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# Powerlifters hoist another national title

Neenah News

Neenah High School's powerlifting team earned its 10th varsity national powerlifting championship last weekend by winning the boys and girls combined raw team title.

The teams, coached by Joe Lewis, also tied for the boys raw team title with the eventual champions but received the runner-up award due to the tiebreaking process. The Neenah's girl's raw team finished in second place, two points out of the national title as well.

At Friday's morning session, Lukas

Quinones placed second and Evan Cardoza was fourth in the 52-kilogram class. Ty Anderson finished fourth in the 56k class and Carter Downs was eighth. Later, in the afternoon session, Emma Donahue placed sixth and Briana Ankerson took eighth in the 52k class and then Sam Volkman finished 16th out of 31 lifters in the 67.5k class in his first year in the sport.

Also Friday, during the evening session, Carly Keesler and Ariana Meunier competed in the 60k class finishing 14th and 17th, respectively, among 25 athletes. Maddy Pritzl, Maddy Janichek



Submitted photo

Members of the Neenah High School powerlifting team hold up their championship banners during a celebratory parade held last week. The squad won their 10th national title at a meet in Lombard, Ill., last weekend.



Submitted photo

The Neenah High School powerlifting team stood at the top of the awards podium after the national meet held last weekend.

and Lauren Tears competed in the 67.5k class, finishing 19th, 20th and 21st, respectively. In the boy's 75k class, Vincent Cardoza finished 21st of 39 athletes while Nolan Mrotek finished 27th.

On Saturday, Neenah had three girls competing in the 75k raw division. Morgan Harwood placed fifth while Marista Fraley finished seventh and Ava Meyer eighth. In the equipped 75k class, Abby Hoelzel finished as national runner-up.

Dominic Corrente finished 18th of 40 lifters and Hudson Tamulion placed on

the 38th spot in the 82.5k class. In the 90k class, Alex Thao finished sixth.

Myah Wenzel was seventh out of 13 lifters in the 82.5k class. Piper Alberg finished fourth and Rylie Trams finished seventh in the 90k class.

The meet held by USA Powerlifting in Lombard, Ill., was spread across eight days involving teen/junior, high school and collegiate athletes. In total, more than 1,800 athletes competed making it the largest powerlifting meet in the world.



# Congratulations

## Neenah Powerlifting Club on a great season 2022 National Powerlifting Champions!

