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Larsen Road upgrade plan aired

Neenah High School traffic and general growth cited

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

The Town of Neenah and McMahon Engineering hosted a public information meeting last week on the Larsen Road reconstruction project that will be underway next year.

The project will encompass a little less than a mile of Larsen Road from Clayton Avenue to Winnebago County CB and will take about five months to complete. Construction is estimated to cost between

\$3 million and \$4 million, with about \$2.17 million funded through the Town Road Improvement Supplemental program.

With Neenah High School opening in Fox Crossing last fall, Rocket Way was created as an access road onto Larsen, which is now considered a new primary route to the school. Traffic counts performed by the East Central Regional Planning Commission in October indicated 4,700 vehicles on the road per day, representing a 24% increase since the school opened.

Traffic is anticipated to continue increasing as the area around the school develops, requiring improvements to ac-

commodate usage. The construction will improve pavement conditions, deal with safety issues, widen the roadway to meet requirements for the volume and speed of traffic, and provide space for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Larsen Road will be reconstructed to a two-lane typical section categorized as urban or rural. The urban sections will include 11-foot travel lanes with a 5-foot-wide urban shoulder and 30-inch curb and gutter. The rural sections will have the same size travel lanes but the shoulder will be 7-feet, including 5 feet of pavement and

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Neenah News

Buckets of fun

Brothers Hudson and Sawyer Klitzka from Oconto Falls were so successful ice fishing on Little Lake Butte des Morts with Grandpa Lonnie Sobeck last Sunday that the pair had trouble carrying their bucket of fish up the hill at Herb and Dolly Smith Park.

County entities, mayors question criteria for ARPA funds

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

Winnebago County has appropriated millions to nonprofits, county departments and local governments due to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), but with roughly half the funds gone the county is facing challenges in meeting expectations for the expenditures.

The county received \$33 million in funds awarded by the federal government in response to COVID-19, delivered in two equal payments in 2021 and 2022.

Nine county supervisors voted against accepting the second payment of \$16.7 million.

The ARPA dollars must be appropriated by the end of this year and spent by the end of 2026 or the county loses the money. As of last week, the county has moved forward on appropriating just under \$16 million.

Neenah Mayor Jane Lang and Menasha Mayor Don Merkes spoke at an ARPA Commission meeting last month, expressing concerns over the county's allocation of the funds.

"I think we've all been a bit confused throughout the process and we felt that there's been a severe lack of communication to the municipalities as far as what your priorities were and how that was being accomplished," Lang told the commission.

Some community leaders feel that projects in Oshkosh have been prioritized for ARPA funds, with three Oshkosh nonprofits receiving a total of \$1.5 million and Sunnyview Expo Center in Oshkosh receiving just under \$1 million.

The board sent a request for \$500,000 for Nova Counseling Services in Oshkosh back to committee last month, with the committee approving it this week and advancing it back to the board. Another \$1.7 million on the commission agenda for low-income and workforce housing in Oshkosh was pulled at the city's request.

At the same time, Neenah and Menasha mayors say their requests for ARPA funds have stalled.

SEE **ARPA funds** ON PAGE 8



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Corrections

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Plan Commission approves S. Commercial townhouse

Neenah News

More housing is coming to Neenah with a site plan for an 11-unit townhouse on South Commercial Street approved Tuesday by the Plan Commission.

Julie Artus of Appleton submitted a site plan to construct a 12,660-square-foot townhouse featuring nine two-bedroom units and two three-bedroom units with attached garages and an off-street parking lot with 24 spaces. The proposed units are all two-stories, with separate entrances and rear patio doors.

The property is at 1557 S. Commercial on the west side of the street, south of Alexander Drive. The site is 39,200 square feet – a little less than an acre – and includes a single-family house that will be demolished.

Land to the north includes commercial use, while land in other directions includes single-family homes. The proposed exterior of the building includes vinyl siding, brick and stone veneer, and cast stone sills, which deputy director of community development Brad Schmidt noted is consistent with the surrounding homes.



Neenah News

The house shown on South Commercial Street will be demolished and the site redeveloped with an 11-unit townhouse.

A new 36-foot driveway connecting to Commercial will be added south of the existing driveway, which will be closed and restored with curb and terrace. Stormwater will be managed with a dry basin on the

south side of the property which will discharge into the storm main at Commercial, finally discharging to the regional pond.

Construction is scheduled to begin this spring and wrap up by the end of the year.

Edward Jones

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ADULT PROGRAMS:

Brain Health Series: Food is Medicine- Optimize Your Brain Health
Feb. 5 at 6:30pm

Sunday Concert: The Crystal River Trio
Feb. 18 at 2pm

Brain Health Series: Sleeping Through the Ages
Feb. 19 at 6:30pm

Cookbook Book Club
Feb. 20 at 6:30pm

100 Things to Do in Wisconsin Dells Before You Die
Feb. 26 at 6:30pm

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS:

9th Annual After-Hours Campout
February 9 | 6:30-7:30 pm

Families can bring blankets and a flashlight, make a fort, curl up and read! S'more snacks and the supplies to make shadow puppet crafts will be provided.



Board Games & Mini Baked Goods
February 19 | 9:00 am-Noon

School-age kids and their caregiver can play board games while enjoying coffee and treats provided by Sweet Lair Cafe.

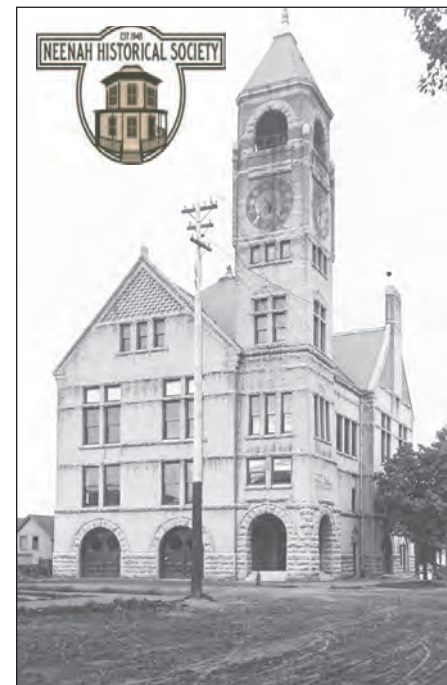
Tween Create Space
Tuesdays @ 3:30 pm
ages 9 and up

February 6 Paper Crafts
February 20 Robot Hands

February Read-to-Me Challenge (ages birth-5)
Read 100 books to your little one in February to earn a free book! Pickup your reading record at the Youth Desk.

Original City Hall

Fifteen years after Neenah was incorporated (1873), plans to build a City Hall were approved. Renowned local architect William Waters designed the building and clocktower. By 1889, City Hall was home to municipal offices, the fire and police departments, as well as four jail cells. The 110-foot-tall clocktower was originally wound by hand. In 1972 the original city hall building was vacated and set to be razed. However, a group of Neenah residents successfully campaigned for preservation of the clocktower, which is recognized as a historic landmark.



Neenah Historical Society photo

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Hoover Elementary to close under boundary proposal

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

The Neenah Joint School District is moving forward on plans to close Hoover Elementary and combine schools at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year as part of a restructuring to deal with shifting populations and declining enrollment.

Hundreds of parents attended either virtual or in-person meetings last week where assistant district administrator of leadership and engagement Chad Buboltz outlined the boundary plan that will be presented to the school board for a first reading Tuesday.

The school district operates eight 4K through sixth grade elementary schools and one charter school. The purpose of changing the boundaries is to consider population shifts, with Horace Mann and Coolidge under capacity and Lakeview currently over capacity by about 6%.

The boundary revision process is intended to ensure resources and facilities are being used efficiently. Closing Hoover will result in cost savings due to a reduction in overall staffing and one fewer building to maintain.

In revising the boundaries, the district is considering changes to the number of sections in schools to make them all three or four sections, meaning three or four respective classes for each grade level.

The plan that the board will vote on later this month is to permanently close Hoover and transfer the students primarily to Horace Mann, with some placed at Coolidge and Tullar. Staff members at Hoover will be relocated in the district and within their employment classification.

Parents will be able to apply for boundary exemptions, with priority given to stu-

dents returning to their attendance area in 2023-24 and students who attended a school on a boundary exemption in 2023-24. All fourth-grade students that apply will be granted an exemption to remain at their current school through the process.

Buboltz said the proposed plan accommodates growth in the Lakeview attendance area, moves Coolidge closer to capacity, and keeps Clayton, Taft and Spring Road intact.

Several parents are upset about the plans to close Hoover, with a "Save Hoover School" flier shared on social media in advance of last week's meeting.

"This change will come at a huge emotional and educational cost for the children and may create several potentially dangerous or expensive transportation issues," the flier reads in part.

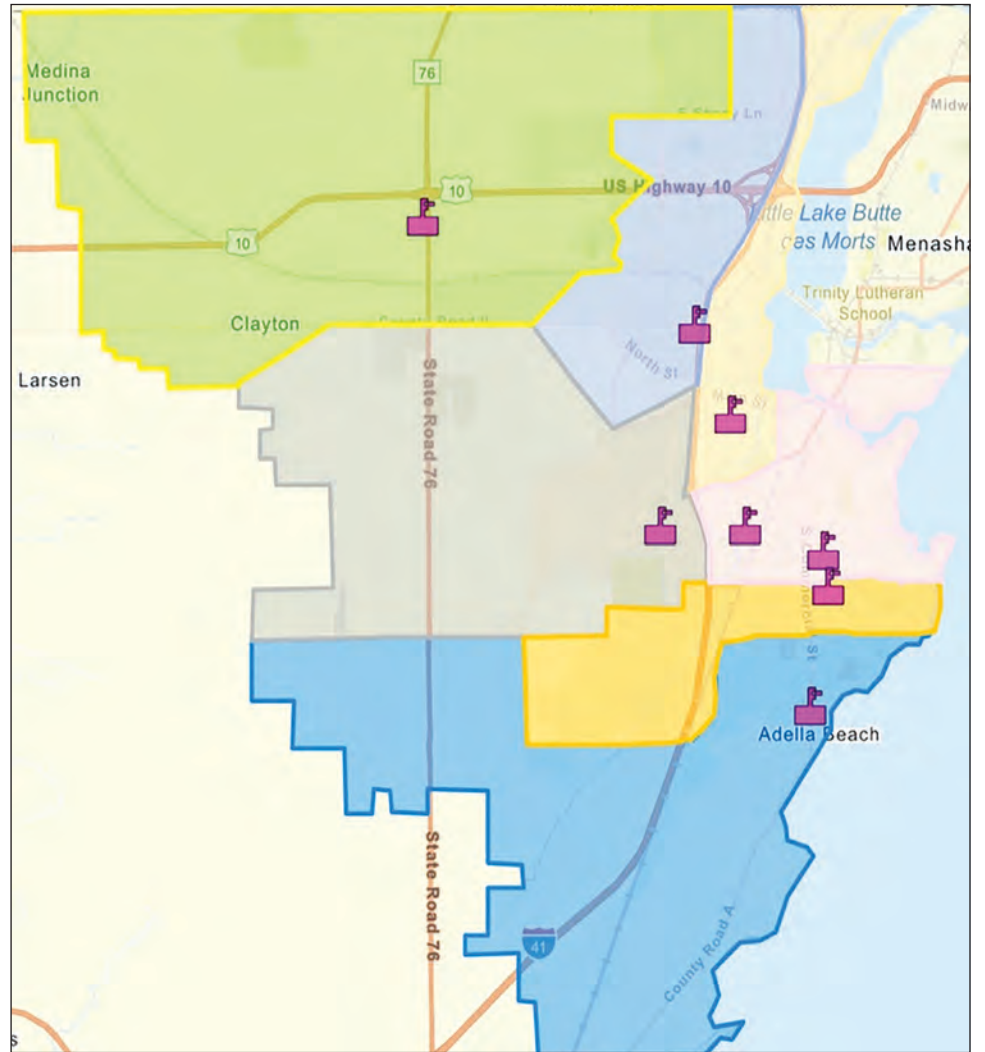
The district has strived to be transparent through the process, with a dedicated webpage at neenah.k12.wi.us/boundaries.cfm that includes frequently asked questions, boundary maps and presentations from the informational meetings.

According to the website, the boundary revisions won't significantly impact the current transportation budget. The district will identify unsafe routes to school and students who utilize those routes would qualify for transportation.

As for mental health, the district wrote that staff will make every effort to make the transitions as comfortable as possible for students.

"In short, the NJSD staff is ready to support each student that enters their classroom each day," the district wrote.

Siblings will remain together in the same school and efforts will be made to keep households on the same street together so



New school boundaries recommended for the Neenah Joint School District are shown.

that students who need to relocate to another school will do so with other students from their neighborhood.

Buboltz said the decision to close Hoover is due to its proximity to other buildings that required a boundary shift. With Hoover in the middle of those areas, he said it makes the most sense to incorporate the student population into other schools.

"Not everybody will be satisfied with 100% of this recommendation – that's very difficult – but I do feel like we've gathered that feedback and I've certainly heard you and your comments and we'll continue to consider those," he said at the meeting.

The board is expected to make a final vote on the boundary revisions at its Feb. 20 meeting.

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Outdoor activities provide county with economic boost

Fishing, trails keep residents, visitors moving

By MaryBeth Matzek
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

Whether on Lake Winnebago, Little Lake Butte des Morts or the Neenah Creek, fishing is a popular activity in the Neenah area no matter the season.

“Throughout the year, you will find people fishing along the water in Neenah. In the summer, it’s extremely popular” drawing people daily from outside of the city, said Mike Kading, Neenah’s director of parks and recreation.

“As Little Lake Butte des Morts and Lake Winnebago freeze over, ice fishing picks up. Neenah also has a sturgeon registration station” that brings people in, he continued.

Fishing and other outdoor recreation activities brought in a record \$9.8 billion to Wisconsin’s gross domestic product in 2022, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis’s Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account. That’s a 6.8% increase over 2021, which was the previous record high.

Other water-related activities include boating, kayaking, paddleboarding and sailing. In Neenah, Kading said kayaking is growing in popularity with more people exploring the city from the water, including Neenah Creek, a channel off the lake, in the spring or other times when the water is high.

Last summer, a kayak launch was added to Arrowhead Park, which the city is still developing plans for. That launch joined ones in Shattuck Park and Herb and Dolly Smith Park.



Photo by David Hall

Fisherman try their luck on the Main Street bridge over the Neenah Creek recently.

To the south in Oshkosh, fishing and watersports are also popular outdoor recreational activities with residents and visitors alike, said Discover Oshkosh executive director Amy Albright.

“In Oshkosh, our major outdoor recreation centers around our water — two lakes (Lake Winnebago and Lake Butte des Morts), connected by a river (Fox River) — makes us a destination for water activities,” she said.

During the winter, sturgeon spearing and ice fishing make a big impact on the

local economy for most communities on Lake Winnebago. Beginning on the second Saturday in February and running two weeks or until that year’s cap levels have been reached, people from all over the country visit the Winnebago system for the opportunity to spear the prehistoric-looking sturgeon.

The season has an estimated \$3.5 million economic impact on the Winnebago system, which includes Lake Winnebago, Lake Poygan and Lake Butte des Morts. Annually, fishing has a \$200

million economic impact on Lake Winnebago and the waters that flow into it, Albrecht said.

“Fishing is huge for our area year-round,” she said. “Sturgeon spearing and ice fishing are big winter draws.”

On the trails

Neenah’s expansive trail systems are popular with runners, walkers and bikers throughout the year, Kading said.

“Throughout the year, you will find people fishing along the water in Neenah. In the summer, it’s extremely popular” drawing people daily from outside of the city, he said.

Loop the Little Lake, a 3.5-mile trail for bikers and pedestrians linking the communities of Neenah, Menasha and Fox Crossing, is a popular draw in Neenah, Kading said.

The trail features scenic vistas of Little Lake Butte des Morts and includes four developed parks and one undeveloped park. An average of 700 people use the trail daily throughout the year.

“In the summer, that daily average is higher,” Kading said. “We also have a lot of people using the trail along Lakeshore Avenue. Plus, the Kimberly Point lighthouse is a big draw. There are always people there when I go over there.”

During winter, the city’s parks and trails become home for other outdoor activities, such as cross-country skiing, sledding and snowshoeing.

Neenah trails attract more than city residents, Kading noted. Visitors from outside the city may also include stops at Neenah restaurants, retailers and gas stations be-

SEE **Outdoor activities** ON PAGE 5

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Outdoor activities

FROM PAGE 4

fore or after their walks or bike rides.

Winnebago County is also home to the Wiouwash State Trail that runs from Hortonville to Oshkosh. Albright said the trail is extremely popular with bikers, runners and walkers. Once the trail arrives in Oshkosh, people can ride on city streets for a bit and connect with the Oshkosh Riverwalk.

Since the pandemic, the number of people participating in outdoor activities has increased, according to the state data. Albright agrees there's been a definite uptick.

"More people are participating in outdoor activities. During the pandemic, we saw people taking advantage of our amazing natural and outdoor resources and that has continued as a trend," she said.

Outdoor recreation activities, such as walking, biking and fishing, are usually free, which also makes them popular, Albright said.

"The activities are also healthy and family-friendly, too," she said.

Outdoor events

When it comes to outdoor recreation and economic impact, soccer comes out on top in Neenah.

The annual Scheel's Flatgrass Soccer Tournament, usually held on Mother's Day weekend, brings in the largest crowd of out-of-town visitors, who spend money on gas, food and lodging, Kading said.

"Memorial Park is the most used park in the city, whether it's for the spring soccer tournament or a smaller one hosted in the fall, league soccer games or other events," he said. "Flatgrass attracts teams from all over Wisconsin, as well as out of Wisconsin."

sin."

Oshkosh is home to multiple events that bring in visitors from across Wisconsin and beyond. Neenah businesses benefit from the events since some visitors usually stay there since it is so close to Oshkosh, Albright said.

EAA AirVenture —the region's largest annual event — is held outdoors at the end of July but does not count per se as outdoor recreation, Albright said.

"AirVenture does bring enthusiasts from all over the world — more than 600,000 — and these people love to be outdoors flying," she said. "It has a huge impact on our local economy."

AirVenture's 2023 economic impact was estimated to be \$170 million for the counties of Winnebago, Outagamie, Fond du Lac, Calumet and Brown. That is based on a 2017 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh economic impact study. The 2023 event saw an estimated 677,000 people attend, the highest number ever.

Lifest, one of the largest Christian music festivals in the nation, also brings thousands of people to the area each summer, too. Held at the Sunnyview Expo Center, Lifest features more than 100 acts on seven stages.

Event organizers estimate Lifest has an economic impact of about \$6 million annually with attendees staying in hotels, eating at local restaurants and visiting local retailers.

Oshkosh's annual Battle on Bago — set for Feb. 16-17 — and its Summer Edition in June bring thousands to the area. One of the nation's largest ice fishing tournaments, Battle on the Bago was created in 2007 to raise funds to support area youth and conservation efforts throughout Wisconsin. Since the event started, it has raised more than \$1.9 million.

Sturgeon protection impact weighed by state legislators

WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

Some members of Wisconsin's congressional delegation are working to prevent the state's lake sturgeon population from being listed as a threatened or endangered species. But conservation advocates say the designation may be warranted as the population has declined dramatically over the last century.

U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher is introducing a bill in the House that would exempt Wisconsin from any listing of lake sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act. He was joined by U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman, state Rep. Michael Schraa, R-Oshkosh, state Rep. Ty Bodden, R-Hilbert, and local sturgeon enthusiasts.

The announcement comes after a bipartisan group of Wisconsin's congressional delegation sent a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last month, urging the agency to exempt the state from any potential listing. The letter was signed by Gallagher, Grothman, the rest of the state's House Republicans, Democratic U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin and Republican U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson.

"It's not just cultural or economic connection that have made our community the sturgeon capital of the world," he said. "We also have the world's most meticulous

management plan. It's one that combines public and private efforts from biologists at the DNR to fishermen and local fishing clubs up and down Lake Winnebago."

While the Winnebago System may have a stable population of lake sturgeon, the fish also live in other bodies of water in the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basin.

According to the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity, lake sturgeon numbers have declined by more than 99 percent over the last century because of overfishing, dams and pollution. As of 2021, the nonprofit said there were less than a dozen large and stable lake sturgeon populations in the country.

In 2018, the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a "threatened" listing under the Endangered Species Act for all lake sturgeon in the country, or alternatively for separate listings of distinct populations as threatened or endangered.

Will Harlan, a senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity, said the agency is looking at genetically distinct sturgeon populations, and it may not provide a designation for the entire species. That means the agency could designate specific areas as threatened or endangered.

Former Neenah police chief D.J. Forcey dies

Former Neenah Police Chief D.J. Forcey Jr. passed away this week at age 73, the Police Department announced on its Facebook page.

Forcey started with the department in

1973 and became Neenah's 16th police chief on June 3, 1986, and held the rank until he retired Jan. 1, 2004. Retired officers noted that he helped evolve the department into community policing.

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Sex offender housing options expanded in county

Winnebago project limited to three units

By Jonathan Richie
NEENAH NEWS

The initial proposal was for 11 units, then it was brought down to eight and by mid-February there will be three completed housing units for previously incarcerated violent sex offenders on supervised release in Winnebago County.

County and Oshkosh officials voted to have violent sex offender housing built on the outskirts of the city between the landfill and Sheriff's Office.

The budget for the project was just over \$1 million. County Executive Jon Doemel said funding became an issue when bids came in much higher than county officials thought. He made the decision to pivot and only build three units as it fit within what the county and city approved.

The units are adjacent to a two-bedroom trailer built at 851 County Y in 2019, allowing for a total of five individuals.

The project is now expected to cost around \$800,000. Doemel said one benefit of the units is that the county will be able to provide for a female occupant if needed.

"We're just trying to get ahead of any is-

ues the state may have," Doemel said.

Chapter 980 housing is designed for the most violent sexual offenders and Wisconsin moved the burden from the state to counties in 2018 to find these formerly incarcerated people housing. Guidelines state these people cannot live within 1,500 feet of a child care center, school, house of worship, youth center or nursing home.

Each ADA-compliant unit being built will be 12 by 28 feet, 576-square-foot structures with a kitchen/living room area, full bathroom, bedroom and laundry facilities.

If the county doesn't find housing options for these individuals, it could

be fined \$1,100 per day or more than \$400,000 per year.

Sheriff John Matz has said that officers can be at the location in 15 to 30 seconds and that during any given shift officers will drive by the units about 25 times.

County facilities and property management director Mike Elder said construction on the three units began in August and is scheduled to be completed this month.

The project has run into supply-chain issues similar to other county projects, said Elder, who added that some parts were ordered in August and have not yet arrived.

Grocery store liquor theft investigated

Neenah News

Surveillance images shared by the Neenah Police Department this week show two suspects accused of stealing 14 bottles of liquor totaling nearly \$900 from the Festival Foods on South Green Bay Road.

Police said the pair were in the store for less than three minutes Jan. 21. Both appear to be carrying large fabric bags used to conceal the bottles. They fled in a white Hyundai Tucson SUV with no front license plate and a rear license plate that isn't legible in the images shared on social media.

As of Wednesday, police were still seeking to identify the suspects, who are facing felony charges. Police said retail theft raises prices for everyone and arrests will be made for those responsible at Neenah businesses.



Neenah Police Department photo
Two suspects accused of stealing about \$900 worth of liquor from Festival Foods are shown on camera.

Calendar of events

Friday, Feb. 2

Grim Waters, Smoke Free Home and Trash Pandas, 9 p.m., Cranky Pat's, 905 S. Commercial St.

Saturday, Feb. 3

Art Activity Day, 10 a.m., Bergstrom-Mahler Museum of Glass
Bike Across Bago, 10 a.m., Lake Winnebago, 1934 County A

Sunday, Feb. 4

Our Saviors Lutheran Church meat raffle, 1 p.m., The Dome, 1338 S. Commercial St.

Thursday, Feb. 8

Local candidates forums, 6 p.m., Neenah City Hall

ah City Hall

Books Are Fun event, 8 a.m., The daCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah

Friday, Feb. 9

Books Are Fun event, 9 a.m., The daCare Regional Medical Center-Neenah

Uncorked & Uncapped, 7 p.m., Best Western Bridgewood Premier Resort

After-Hours Campout, 6:30 p.m., Neenah Public Library

Saturday, Feb. 10

Warm Your Heart, 11 a.m., downtown Neenah

The Crystal Ball, 7 p.m., Ballroom at the Reserve, 116 S. Commercial St.

Dying 2 Live, 2 p.m., Word Fellowship, 1020 Tullar Road

Monday, Feb. 12

Monday Matinees, 1 p.m., Neenah Public Library

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Larsen Road

FROM PAGE 1

2 feet of gravel. The project will increase the width of the existing road by 10 feet to a total of 36 feet.

The 5-foot-wide paved shoulders on Larsen Road meet the design requirements for on-street bicycle accommodations. A 10-foot-wide paved trail for bicycles and pedestrians will be constructed along the south side of Larsen Road, providing a connection to the trail on County CB. The town is also proposing to extend the trail to the east from CB to the east town line as part of future reconstruction of Oakridge Road.

Curb and gutter will be constructed the entire length of the project on the south side of the roadway. The north side will include curb and gutter from Clayton Avenue through the intersection of Rocket Way and then a rural section from Rocket Way to County CB.

A new storm sewer system will be constructed that will eliminate ditches adjacent to the urbanized areas. The ditches along the north side of Larsen Road between Rocket Way and CB will be re-graded to improve drainage, and stormwater quality devices will be incorporated into the storm sewer system to compensate for the loss of drainage swales.

The existing ditch slopes are not considered recoverable if an errant vehicle leaves the roadway and will be flattened to provide recoverable slopes and meet clear zone requirements. The centerline profile will be lowered about 1-2 feet to improve the sight distance for vehicles exiting Rocket Way.

Improvements also include left-turn lanes at Rocket Way and Oakridge Road



Neenah News

The intersection of Rocket Way and Larsen Road will have a new traffic signal system with streetlights and crosswalks added next year as part of the Town of Neenah's Larsen Road reconstruction project.

West, and right-turn lanes at Clayton Avenue and Rocket Way. The temporary traffic signals at the Rocket Way intersection will be replaced with a new fully actuated traffic signal system that includes streetlights. Crosswalks will be added at the intersection with Rocket Way.

The project requires an estimated 0.71 acres of strip fee title acquisition to accommodate the wider roadway; an estimated 0.39 acres of permanent limited easements for ditches, storm sewer and culverts; and 2.23 acres of temporary limited easements to grade abutting properties to match the new roadway grades.

About 20 people attended the meeting to learn more about the project and ask questions, with the primary concerns related to property acquisitions. Several residents said there are established trees in the areas the town plans on acquiring and questioned whether the trees would be removed and if they'd be compensated for the loss.

Mike Simon with McMahon said the company will make efforts to minimize

the impact on trees and if the construction requires tree removal, residents will be compensated for the loss and the value included in the offer homeowners receive.

Right-of-way acquisition will begin this year, with the town hiring an appraiser to determine the value of property and compensation offers for acquisition, and a right-of-way consultant to act as an intermediary in negotiations between homeowners and the town.

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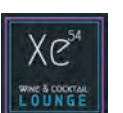
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Superintendent search meetings set

The Neenah Joint School District and its superintendent search partner Hazard Young Attea Associates are hosting focus group meetings to guide the search for the next school superintendent to replace Mary Pfeiffer, who is retiring in June.

Public attendance in person and online is welcome along with feedback. Participants do not need to preregister. Meetings include:

- **6 p.m. Sunday:** Community members on Zoom (link will be provided on district website)
- **10 a.m. Wednesday:** Nonprofit orga-

nization representatives (District office, Room 200)

- **11 a.m. Wednesday:** Community business partners and representatives (District office, Room 200)

- **6 p.m. Wednesday:** Community members (Middle School, Room 128)

- **7 a.m. Thursday:** PTO/Booster Club members (Middle School, Room 128)

- **6 p.m. Thursday:** Community members with no students in NJSD schools (District office, Board Room)

Go to Neenah.k12.wi.us for more information.

Town hall meeting invites legislators

All state legislators representing the Fox Valley region have been invited to participate in a virtual Legislative Town Hall meeting from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday hosted by the League of Women Voters of Appleton-Fox Cities and co-sponsored by the Winnebago County and Greater Green Bay leagues.

Area legislators invited include state Sens. Rachael Cabral-Guevara, Robert Cowles, Dan Feyen, Andre Jacque and Eric Wimberger, and state Assembly representatives Joy Goeben, Nate Gustafson,

Joel Kitchens, John Macco, David Murphy, Lori Palmeri, Kristina Shelton, Lee Snodgrass, David Steffen and Ron Tusler.

Legislators will be given an opportunity to outline their priorities for the current legislative session and answer questions provided to them in advance.

Registration is required, and can be made on the League of Women Voters of Appleton-Fox Cities website, lwvappletonfoxcities.org and clicking on the Legislative Town Hall listing under Upcoming Events.

Metro area jobless rate at 2.3% in December

Neenah News

The Oshkosh-Neenah metropolitan area and Winnebago County saw a small drop in its unemployment rate from 2.4 percent to 2.3 percent between November and December, according to preliminary data from the state Department of Workforce Development.

Last December's jobless rate in Oshkosh-Neenah and Winnebago County was

at 1.9 percent.

The non-seasonally adjusted data shows jobless rates in Metropolitan Statistical Areas decreased or stayed the same in all of Wisconsin's 12 metro areas over the year and month.

Unemployment rates decreased or stayed the same in 32 of Wisconsin's 35 largest cities and increased in 67 of 72 counties over the month.

ARPA funds

FROM PAGE 1

"It's been a very difficult path for us to follow as municipalities," Merkes said. "We've watched this through time and things change, dates change, processes change, but speaking with our neighboring communities, we have some questions as to the criteria for awarding funds, the geographic distribution of those funds and priorities of the committee."

Merkes said Menasha is seeking funding to redevelop the Nicolet Elementary School, which closed in 2022, and the Whiting Paper Mill, which closed in 2016 and burned down in 2021.

Merkes said one of the major reasons the Whiting property hasn't been redeveloped is because Winnebago County is currently collecting interest and holding debt of upward of \$1.2 million. Menasha requested that the county waive the debt to allow the city to acquire the property and utilize it for a \$10 million to \$50 million development.

Both cities are seeking ARPA dollars to purchase and install mobile traffic barriers to ensure the safety of residents during parades and other events. The ARPA Commission approved awarding \$184,957 to Menasha and \$300,000 to Neenah for the traffic barriers at last month's meeting. The county board still needs to approve the funds before the cities receive them.

Other ARPA proposals approved that the board will need to vote on:

- \$387,500 to fund the south leg of a two-lane roundabout at Leonard Point Road and State 21 in the Town of Algoma.
 - \$500,000 to build an emergency service training facility for the Neenah/Menasha Fire Department.
 - \$324,500 to upgrade Winneconne parks, including remodeling the barn and improving boat ramps and piers, fish cleaning stations, larger bulk heads and extended parking in the Village of Winneconne.
- If the board approves those expenditures the county would have about \$12.3 million in ARPA dollars remaining, plus interest.

- \$343,000 to update water and sewer lines under the Fox River in Omro.

- \$75,000 to NEW Mental Health Connection for updates to technology and website content.

- \$403,625 to Tri-County Community Dental Clinic for updated dental equipment and supporting technology.

- \$350,000 to Child Care Resource and Referral for supporting care providers with training and mentoring and to assist with staff retention and recruiting family child care.

- \$50,000 to Pillars Inc. for its semi-independent program for young adults living with mental health challenges.

Here's where the other \$15.6 million went:

- \$250,000 to Omro Area Community Center.

- \$175,000 to the County Executive's Office for assistance with strategic planning and priority-based budgeting.

- \$2.725 million for radios for county departments.

- \$925,000 to Sunnyview Expo Center.

- \$300,000 for a countywide building condition assessment study.

- \$3.03 million for future conservation projects within the county.

- \$542,600 for a redundant fiber loop between the county administration building and the sheriff's office.

- \$150,000 for digital audio and visual upgrades to meeting rooms.

- \$120,000 for automated pay stations at county-owned boat landings.

- \$500,000 to Boys & Girls Club of Oshkosh.

- \$500,000 to Greater Fox Cities Area Habitat for Humanity.

- \$500,000 to Solutions Recovery Oshkosh.

- \$500,000 to Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services Oshkosh.

- \$500,000 to St. Vincent de Paul Neenah/Menasha food pantry.

- \$2.1 million to Winnebago County Fire Chiefs Association.

- \$314,600 to Winnebago County Jail.

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Joneson continues Neenah tradition of talented divers

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

During his sophomore season on the Neenah High School swim team, Kyle Joneson looked across the swimming area at the Neenah Middle School pool where the Rocket divers were going through their paces.

Joneson, who had never competed in diving, thought it looked interesting.

"I looked over there and was like that looks really fun," Joneson said. "It was a challenge at first but as I started putting more in and started understanding it more, it became a fun thing for me to do."



Joneson

Joneson has been the lone diver for the Rockets this season and will play a key role for Neenah this week-

end as the program looks to add to its legacy of conference championships in boys swimming.

The Rockets have won four straight Fox Valley Association titles and eight of the last nine. The program leads the conference with 24 FVA crowns overall.

That litany of success is something every member of the Neenah program is proud of and wants to continue.

"Continuing Neenah's dominance is pretty important to all of us," Joneson said. "This entire season we have put in a lot of work. We all want to win conference. We are going to swim fast. I'm going to dive my best and we are going to win."

Winning the conference title is actually a two-day task and Joneson takes center stage on Friday evening when only the divers compete.

It's not unusual for large swim meets

Senior Standout

like conference or sectionals to be split up that way but there is certainly a different vibe around the pool on the two days.

"It is a lot quieter (on Fridays)," Joneson said. "There aren't as many people that show up. A lot more families come to the swimming part of it than the diving."

Joneson doesn't mind having most of the pool area to himself – and the other conference divers – on a given night because that is often the case at practice as well.

Although the rest of the team is at the pool area for practice, they are all in the pool swimming. Joneson is off by himself in the diving area.

"We practice together but we don't get to talk with each other because I'm on board and they are in the pool. Not a lot of time talking so this allows that," Joneson said. "Working by myself, I'm able to get into my own rhythm. I can take as much as I need or I can speed it up a little bit."

Being a diver can be difficult because of the separation from the bulk of the team. Practicing apart, going to meets on different days and even in dual meets, the swimming portion of the event stops to allow the diving competition.

So, Joneson will also swim with the team on Saturday, participating in one of the relays and the 50-yard freestyle. He doesn't expect to land on the podium for either event but that isn't the point.

"I feel like it brings me closer to the team," Joneson said. "I wasn't expecting to get the best times but they were good

enough to be varsity times."

Joneson said that his practice time this week was spent preparing for Friday night's diving program.

At this point of the season, he's not adding anything new to his roster of dives, just working on making sure everything's perfect.

"It's definitely 100 percent fine-tuning stuff this week," said Joneson, who plans to attend the University of North Dakota next year to major in commercial aviation. "There are a couple (of dives for conference) that can be improved but for the most part I'm feeling good."

Following this weekend's conference meet, Neenah will host the WIAA Division 1 sectional meet on Friday and Saturday and Joneson is certainly looking to advance to state in his senior season.

He missed making the trip last year by less than 10 points, something that motivated him for this season.

"It was pretty disappointing," Joneson said. "I missed one of my dives and I was about four points off from going to state. It really pushed me to practice more and get better. It was a big motivating factor. It pushed me a lot."

Joneson did attend the state meet and watched fellow diver Ryan Foucault compete.

Foucault, who graduated last year, is someone that Joneson credits for getting him up to speed in the sport quickly



Submitted photo

Senior Kyle Joneson has his sights set on diving at the WIAA Division 1 state meet later this season.

SEE **Senior Standout** ON PAGE 11

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Defense delivers strong effort as Rockets roll to win

By Dustin Riese
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

The last time Neenah faced off against Appleton East in a Fox Valley Association girls basketball game, the Patriots put up 72 points on the Rockets.

Neenah was not going to let that happen again.

The Rockets held the Patriots to under 16 points in each half and walked away with a dominating 64-25 victory Tuesday. "This was a terrific performance by us tonight, especially on the defensive end," Neenah head coach Andrew Braunel said. "It was a very high-scoring game the last time we played them so we made it a point to focus on defense the past two days at practice. Knowing that they can score 70 points per game, we knew the defense was going to have to carry us and they did."

Led by Allie Ziebell and her 23 points, the Rockets were locked into a battle early on, but after a Ziebell triple gave Neenah a 7-5 lead they never looked back. Neenah was trailing 5-4 at one point until a 10-0 run put them in front 14-5.

The Patriots went nearly eight minutes without a field goal during the first half, which allowed the trio of Ziebell, Rowan Klemsit and Kayla White to stretch the lead. Neenah also got a boost from Ellie Buss in the first half.

Klesmit finished with 15 points and White added 11 while Buss totaled nine.

The Rockets ended the first half on a

Ziebell tabbed for McDonald's All-American Game

Neenah High School senior Allie Ziebell has been chosen to play in the prestigious McDonald's All-American Game to be held April 2 at the Toyota Center in Houston.



Ziebell

Ziebell, who is committed to UConn for next season, was named to the team last week, marking the second straight year a player from Wisconsin will participate in the annual event. Last year, Germantown's KK Arnold – who will be Ziebell's teammate at UConn next year – was selected to participate.

Ziebell was the Wisconsin Gatorade Player of the Year last season after averaging 25.5 points, 8.6 rebounds and 4.5 assists for the Rockets, who advanced to a WIAA Division 1 sectional final.

This season, the reigning Fox Valley Association Player of the Year is averaging nearly 28 points per game, with 8.4 rebounds per game, while shooting 46.5 percent from three-point range.

Ziebell also won a gold medal this summer with USA Basketball's U19 squad at the 2023 FIBA World Cup.

For her career, Ziebell has scored 2,526 points, which ranks as the fifth highest total in state history.

31-7 run to seize a 23-point lead.

Neenah's defensive stopper Rachel Dietrich had one of her best games of the season on the defensive end. Dietrich was tasked with guarding the Patriots' leading scorer Lily Meulemans and she made her life miserable throughout.

Meulemans finished with just six points.

"I thought all of the girls played great on the defensive end tonight," Dietrich said.

"When we got beat off the ball we communicated well and recovered as a team. They have a lot of good shooters who can also put the ball on the floor. I just tried to stay in my defensive stance and get as low as possible to take some of their strengths away."

Braunel was certainly pleased with Dietrich's work.

"Rachel has the ability to lock anyone down in this conference which is why

we want her to be on their best player," Braunel said. "We believe in her and believe she is one of the best defenders in the conference and she proved it tonight."

Ziebell and Klesmit picked up where they left off in the first half as they scored 10 of the first 11 points to begin the second half for Neenah, which opened up a 48-20 lead.

The Rockets then all but sealed the win with an 18-5 run midway through the second half that put Neenah ahead 64-25.

Although the point total climbed for the Rockets, Braunel was proud of how the kids responded defensively.

"With (Appleton East's) big three averaging close to 50 per game, we knew we had to pick up the ball right away," Braunel said. "If you don't, they are going to find their shooters and they are a terrific shooting team. A lot of their looks come off of dribble penetration, and for the most part we took that away from them tonight and forced them to earn their points."

With the stretch run of the regular season approaching, the win has the Rockets excited about what lies ahead.

"State is our ultimate goal this season," Dietrich said. "I feel like as a group, we are such a tight group and we have a ton of fun playing with each other. The chemistry as a team is something special and I feel that we can make it to state this season."

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Prep sports roundup

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Zephyrs extend win streak

St. Mary Catholic jumped to a 19-point halftime lead and cruised past Kohler, 73-39, Tuesday to extend its winning streak to seven.

Emily Vogel led three players in double figures for the Zephyrs with 18 points.

Audrey Norville added 15 points and Kate Nackers finished with a season-high 14 points. Sienna Anderson and Lauren Ripley each chipped in nine.

The fourth-ranked Zephyrs now hold a two-game lead in the Big East North standings and are 18-1 overall.

Last Friday, the Zephyrs knocked off rival Mishicot, 65-51.

Vogel finished with 17 points to lead St. Mary Catholic, while Norville totaled 12 points and 11 rebounds and Anderson chipped in 10.

Neenah rallies for win

The Rockets rallied from a three-point halftime deficit to secure a 71-59 win over Kaukauna last Friday, holding the Ghosts to just 20 points after intermission.

Allie Ziebell poured in 30 points – her seventh game with at least 30 points this season – to lead the way from the Rockets. Rowan Klesmit added 18 points and Abbie Fischer chipped in eight.

BOYS BASKETBALL

Neenah climbs standings

The Rockets put together a three-game winning streak over a five-day span and moved up into fourth place in the Fox Valley Association standings.

The streak started with a 63-54 win over Kaukauna last Friday as the Rockets out-

scored the Ghosts 34-25 in the second half.

Brady Corso led the Rockets with 24 points, eight rebounds and six assists, while Luke Jung added 15 points and Cal Juckem chipped in nine.

The following night, the Rockets held Appleton North to a season-low 37 points in a 57-37 victory.

Corso again led the team with 16 points and added seven assists, while Jung and Charlie Wunderlich each scored 14.

The Rockets then posted a 62-55 win over Appleton East on Tuesday, with Corso scoring 24 points and Jung adding 21.

Zephyrs fall to Kohler

St. Mary Catholic rallied from being down 13 points at halftime but couldn't overtake Kohler in an 82-72 loss to the Blue Bombers on Tuesday.

Braeden Brenn scored 24 points to lead St. Mary Catholic, which had four players finish in double figures. Fisher Mackenzie added 13, Kieran Barrientos had 12 and Luke Fairweather added 10.

Last week, the Zephyrs picked up a pair of wins, including a 67-61 nonconference victory over Menasha led by Mackenzie's 17-point, 15-rebound performance. Brenn and Preston Fields each added 16 points and Mason Uhlenbrauck totaled 10.

St. Mary Catholic also routed Mishicot, 80-36, with Brenn finishing with 23 points and nine rebounds in his first game back from injury. Mackenzie added 17 points, while Fairweather and Uhlenbrauck added 12 and 10 points, respectively.

HOCKEY

Rockets net tourney win

Neenah/Hortonville/Menasha erupted

for 11 goals in an 11-0 win over Fox Cities in the first round of the Badgerland Conference Tournament on Tuesday.

Mark Sutton tallied a hat trick in the game, while Ben Carey, Ryan Johnson and Ty Laabs each had two goals. Chase Collins and Jack Weinholzer also scored.

Cooper Zinda had three assists in the win, while Calvin Zinda, Collis and Preston Marnicha each had two.

John Horneck made 15 saves in goal.

The Rockets also posted a lopsided win last Thursday, dropping Oshkosh 10-0 in the final regular season conference contest.

Ten different players notched goals in the game for Neenah/Hortonville/Menasha.

The Rockets scored six times in the opening period with Evan Hans, Ben Carey, Cartyr Simonson, Cooper Zinda, Cole Rothermel and Ty Laabs each finding the net.

Chase Collins and Mark Sutton added goals in the second period, while Jack Weinholzer and Yamil Darwich recording tallies in the third period.

Laabs and Simonson each finished with three assists for the Rockets.

Aaron Jacoby made 11 saves in goal to earn the shutout.

BOYS WRESTLING

Rockets breeze past West

Neenah racked up eight pins in breezing

past the Terrors in an FVA dual meet last week.

Eli Armatti (120), Logan Tessier (126) and Dane Granditzke (132) rattled off three straight pins to extend the Rockets lead to 27-4, while Landen Sheppard followed with a technical fall victory at 138 pounds.

Declan Koch at 144 pounds and Jacob Herm at 150 pounds also notched pins as the Rockets pulled ahead 44-4.

Kaden Roth (165), Connor Simons (190) and Jeremy Wiggs-Schmalz (215) also picked up pins for Neenah, while Nate Cleveland opened the match with a decision win at heavyweight.

Jaxson Ennis won by forfeit at 106 pounds for the Rockets.

GIRLS WRESTLING

Neenah claims invite title

Ava Armatti captured the 138-pound title to highlight the day for Neenah, which edged Southern Door by seven points at a 31-team invitational.

Armatti pinned all three of her opponents en route to the title, stopping Manitowoc Lincoln's Amellia Fowler in 3:09 in the title match.

Lillian Granditzke added a third-place finish at 120 pounds, while Ashlynn Scheidermayer (114) and Kylee Kurszewski (126) were each fourth and Emma Verbrick was fifth.

Senior Standout

FROM PAGE 9

and getting him to a level where he has a chance to make it to state.

"If it wasn't for Ryan, I probably wouldn't be where I'm at today," said

Joneson, who also credits the Neenah diving coaches for helping him succeed. "With Ryan there, it helps having more than one person there to tell you what to do. You can hear it a million times from your coach and it doesn't work and then you hear it once from someone else and it works instantly."

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FEBRUARY 2 IS GROUNDHOG DAY

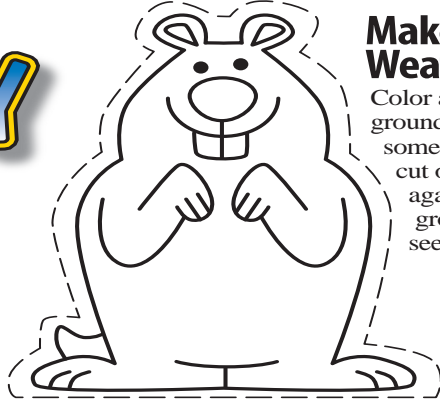
For hundreds of years, people have thought that the groundhog can predict the weather. It's believed that if the groundhog sees its shadow when it leaves its burrow on the second day of February, the winter will last another six weeks.

But, if the sun isn't shining, then there are no shadows to be seen. People say when this happens, spring will arrive soon.

The Most Famous Groundhog

In the town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, there is a special groundhog called **Punxsutawney Phil**.

Each year on the morning of February 2nd, people in the town wait patiently for Punxsutawney Phil to come out of his burrow. News shows and newspapers around the country will tell everyone whether or not he sees his shadow.



Make a Groundhog Weather Detector

Color and cut out this little groundhog. Glue it onto some heavier paper and cut out the groundhog again. Stand your little groundhog outside and see if it casts a shadow.



Do Not Disturb!

Each August the groundhog starts eating a lot. It eats and eats. A layer of fat forms under its skin.

As the weather gets colder in the fall, the fat groundhog goes to its little underground bedroom with its cushion of grass to curl up and sleep.



It falls into such a deep sleep that it appears dead. This is called hibernation.

USE THE SECRET CODE: What is another name for a groundhog?

C = <input type="checkbox"/>	N = <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
D = <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	O = <input type="checkbox"/>
H = <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	U = <input type="checkbox"/>
K = <input type="checkbox"/>	W = <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Is Phil correct?

Punxsutawney Phil is not right about the weather every year. Circle every other letter to see how often Phil is right about the end of winter weather.

A W B G O J U R T N F
L O M R F T H Y J P K
E P R Y C B E L N F T
V O Z F O T W H V E
Y T A I L M R E T

A B

How do animals know when to hibernate?

Scientists have found a special chemical in the blood of hibernating animals. The chemical is called **HIT** or **Hibernation Inducement Trigger**. Although scientists do not know what this chemical is, they do know that it appears when one of three things happen:

- The days become shorter and there is less light.
- There is a big drop in temperature.
- Food is scarce.

One summer day, blood with HIT taken from a hibernating groundhog was injected into a lively one. Result: **Hibernation!**

If you were the scientist—what would be your conclusion about this experiment?

Standards Link: Life Science: Understand that humans and animals have structures that aid in survival.

Extra! Extra! Weather Words

Look outside. What is your weather like today? Look through the newspaper for five words that describe your weather. Circle each word.

Standards Link: Science: Identify different kinds of weather.

Kid Scoop Together

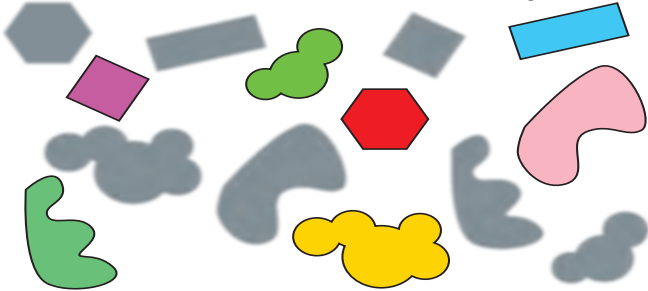
How to Draw a Groundhog

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Kid Scoop Puzzler

Light travels in a straight line from its source. When light reaches an opaque (solid) object, the light is prevented from moving through the object, leaving an area of darkness on the other side (a shadow).

Find the shadow for each of these shapes.



Standards Link: Science: Understand physical properties of light.

Double Double Word Search

- AUGUST
- BURROW
- CASTS
- CURL
- EATS
- END
- FOOD
- GROUNDHOG
- LIGHT
- PHIL
- SHADOW
- SLEEP
- SUN
- TOWN
- WINTER

Find the words in the puzzle. How many of them can you find on this page?

W I N T E R F S V E
D A U G U S T O W L
L N W O T A M C O I
I C P E E L S A J D
G B U H N O H S Q L
H Y K R I D A T U A
T N R S L L D S A N
G O H D N U O R G B
T B U R R O W F J O

Standards Link: Letter sequencing. Recognize identical words. Skim and scan reading. Recall spelling patterns.

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