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South Commercial Street reopens

Businesses feel impact of seven-month closure

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

Neenah's \$10.8 million overhaul of South Commercial Street is complete, giving the corridor safer streets, upgraded sidewalks and refreshed streetscape, though some local businesses are still feeling the effects of the months-long closure.

The city of Neenah held a press conference Wednesday to mark the completion of road work on a 1.5-mile stretch of South Commercial between Tyler and Stanley



Neenah News

Vehicles travel through the intersection of South Commercial and West Cecil streets after the completion of a seven-month reconstruction project.

streets, one of the largest street projects in Neenah's history.

The reconstruction took about seven months and was funded with 69% feder-

al dollars and 31% municipal dollars. It includes upgrades to storm sewers, pavement, sidewalks, driveways, streetscaping and traffic signals.

"Completion of the South Commercial Street reconstruction is more than a milestone in infrastructure – it's a strong reaffirmation of our commitment to Neenah's future," Mayor Jane Lang said. "This project, delivered on time and on budget, reflects what we can accomplish when city leadership, state and federal partners, and the community work together toward a shared vision."

SEE **Street reopens** ON PAGE 9



Photo by David Hall

Exploring the wonders of science

Curiosity took center stage Saturday during the Wisconsin Science Festival at the Neenah Public Library, where families explored hands-on experiments, demonstrations and creative STEAM activities. The statewide festival celebrates science, technology, engineering, art and math with events for all ages across more than 100 Wisconsin communities.

Land restoration initiative underway at high school

By Chris Lusvardi
NEENAH NEWS

An ongoing initiative is focused on land restoration at Neenah High School in Fox Crossing.

Over the past year and a half, teachers Ryan Walter and Nathaniel Blood have been leading efforts to restore the farmland that was once in the area into prairie with native plants. They have secured a grant from Pheasants Forever to help fund part of the project and have received support from principal Brian Wunderlich, the school grounds crew, students and environmental consulting firm Merjent Inc.

Approximately 107 acres of land could be restored, Walter said.

"We have started off small just to get some traction and are in the process of restoring about 4.5 acres near our outdoor classroom," Walter said. "We just got word from Merjent that they would be able to plant wildflower seed in an additional 3.5 acres as well. We will also be focusing on the abundance of wooded areas as well."

Walter said a lot of invasive buckthorn needs to be removed from the property. In addition, Walter said he has put 25 bluebird houses up around the property and have monitored those for the last two years for BRAW (Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin).

SEE **Land restoration** ON PAGE 5



Submitted photo

Students use the property at Neenah High School to research and explore different topics.

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Corrections
It is the policy of Neenah News to correct all errors of fact. For correction information call 920-385-4512.

About the newspaper
Published weekly and mailed free of charge Thursdays for Friday delivery (may vary based on U.S. Postal Service and holidays) to more than 21,000 homes and businesses in the Neenah and Fox Crossing areas. An E-edition of the newspaper can be accessed at www.neenahnews.com.

Neenah News is owned by Oshkosh Herald LLC, 36 Broad St. Suite 300, Oshkosh, WI, 54901. 920-385-4512.

Chamber Fox Talks session features brand marketing

Neenah News

Registration is now open for the next Fox Cities Chamber Fox Talks session, “Ignite Your Brand: From Social Media to the Winner’s Circle,” to be held from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Nov. 19 at Community First Credit Union, 1575 Dresang Way in Neenah.

In this joint session, Emily Schwartz, owner and founder of Wholehearted Health with Emily, and Amanda Van Den Elzen, founder of BetterWork, bring together two unique perspectives to help attendees strengthen their presence and stand out with authenticity.



Schwartz



Van Den Elzen

Schwartz will share how to transform social media from an overwhelming chore into an effective tool for connection and visibility. Van Den Elzen will draw on lessons from the racetrack to show how resilience, alignment and personal branding fuel long-term success. Together, they’ll offer actionable strategies and relatable stories to help participants build confidence, grow their brand, and embrace challenges as opportunities.

The seminar is free for Fox Cities Chamber members, and \$25 for non-members. To register, go to members.foxcc.net.

UW-Madison alumni to show documentary

Neenah News

UW-Madison alumni and their families are invited to join the Fox Valley Chapter of the Wisconsin Alumni Association for an advance screening of the Bucky! documentary.

The screening will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Nov. 5 in the Shattuck Community Room at the Neenah Public Library.

Produced by PBS Wisconsin, Bucky! chronicles the history and impact of the state’s most iconic mascot. At this free event, attendees will get to see an unreleased version of the film ahead of its national premiere on Dec. 2.

Narrated by comedian and UW alum

Charlie Berens, the program explores the history of Bucky Badger, his cultural impact on Wisconsin and his rise to something larger than just a mascot. His story is told through interviews by those who donned the Bucky costume, the families of his creators and footage from the past that has not been seen publicly in decades – if ever.

Following the screening, attendees are invited to stick around for Babcock ice cream and a Q&A session featuring several former Bucky’s who are now residents of the Fox Valley.

Due to limited capacity, advance registration is required at uwalumni.com/events/fox-valley-bucky-screening/.

Author to hold talk, book signing at library

Neenah News

Author Lori Jones will discuss her book Spared: A Memoir of Risk and Resolve at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Neenah Public Library.

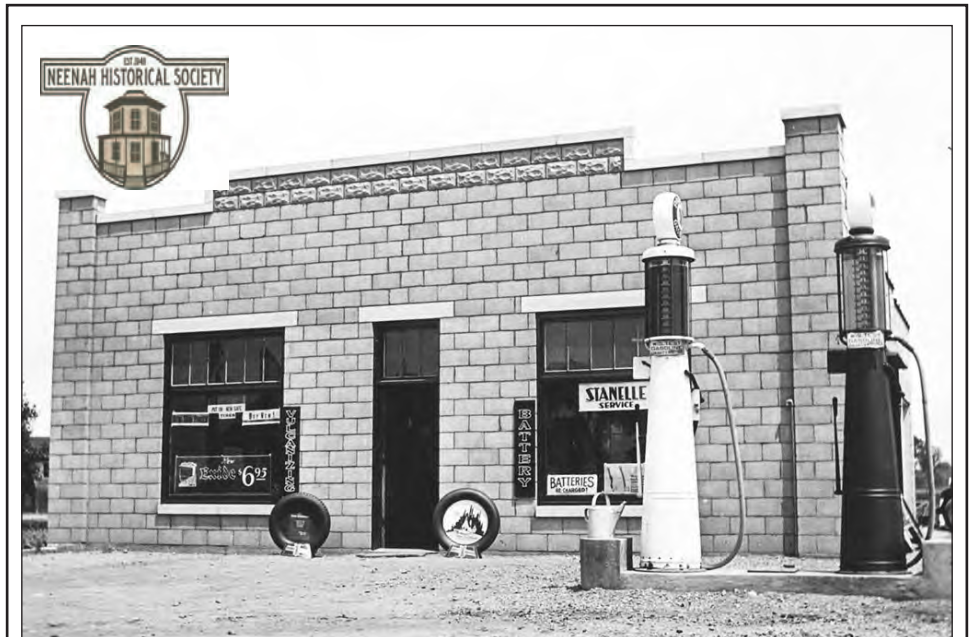
The book chronicles the author’s journey from childhood, where she observes her father’s decline due to Huntington’s Disease (HD), a hereditary, neurological, degenerative illness with limited treatment options and no cure. Jones’ home was filled with uncertainty, secrecy and shame as she navigated this challenging environment.

As she transitioned into adulthood, Jones confronts the ethical dilemmas surrounding the potential inheritance or

transmission of the HD gene. Simultaneously, she took on the role of her father’s guardian, advocating for his needs and dignity.

The family’s story spans three generations and addresses often overlooked issues faced by individuals with HD and their caregivers. Readers will discover the detrimental effects of delayed diagnoses and secrecy, which can lead to isolation and contribute to poverty.

Jones explores the harsh realities and lesser-discussed facets of what is often recognized as one of the most devastating illnesses, with symptoms likened to ALS, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s occurring simultaneously.



Neenah Historical Society photo

Stanelle’s Service Shop 1931

Neenah residents have likely driven by 912 S. Commercial Street countless times but have never realized the history of this modest building. In 1931, Frank Stanelle built a new service station at Commercial Street and the “city limits” (Cecil Street). The modern building allowed Stanelle to expand his service work on automobiles.

Calendar of events

Friday, Oct. 24

Rocket Players presents Mary Poppins, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Performing Arts Center

Saturday, Oct. 25

Craft Fair, 9 a.m., St. Gabriel Parish, 900 Geiger St.

Craft Sale, 9 a.m., Congregational United Church of Christ, 1511 Nicolet Boulevard

Craft and Bake Sale, 9 a.m., St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, 140 S. Green Bay Road

Hot Diggity Dog, 10 a.m., Neenah Animal Shelter, 2475 Progress Court

Halloween Carnival, 10 a.m., St. Margaret Mary Parish, Elementary School Parking Lot

Monster Mash Dance Party, 10:30 a.m., Shattuck Park

Meet and Greet Author Jesica Schwarzbauer of Bilancia Wellness, 11 a.m., Lyons Fine Books, 127 W. Wisconsin Ave.

Farm Tours and Hayrides, 11 a.m., Cavanaugh Carriages, 3910 Fairview Road

Trunk or Treat, 2 p.m., Peace Lutheran Church of Neenah, 1228 S. Park Ave.

Rocket Players presents Mary Poppins, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Performing Arts Center

Sunday, Oct. 26

Rocket Players presents Mary Poppins, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Performing Arts Center

Thursday, Oct. 30

Meet and Greet Author Brent Marlo of The Santa Alvera Murders, 4 p.m., Lyons Fine Books, 127 W. Wisconsin Ave.

Lori Jones Book Signing and Talk, 6:30 p.m., Neenah Public Library

Friday, Oct. 31

Trick or Treating hours, 4-7 p.m., Neenah and Fox Crossing

Doty Cabin Trick or Treating, 4-7 p.m., Doty Cabin Museum, 701 Lincoln St.

Saturday, Nov. 1

Helping Hands Art and Craft Fair, 9 a.m., Ron Einerson Fieldhouse at Neenah Middle School

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

Wednesday, Nov. 5

Bucky! Screening, 6 p.m., Neenah Public Library

Thursday, Nov. 6

Campfire with the Cops, 5:30 p.m., Memorial Park

Friday, Nov. 7

First Friday Concert featuring Sue Fink, 2 p.m., Neenah Public Library

Saturday, Nov. 8

Fall Craft Fair, 9 a.m., Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 1140 Tullar Road

Monday, Nov. 10

Short Story Night, 7 p.m., Lion’s Tail Brewing Co.

Tuesday, Nov. 11

Veterans Day Celebration, 11 a.m., Shattuck Park

American Legion Post 33 Auxiliary Veterans Day Dinner, 5 p.m., The Dome

Thursday, Nov. 13

Future Neenah Shop and Stroll, 3 p.m., Downtown Neenah



Submitted photo

Pumpkin deliveries

Heather Higgins delivered 275 pumpkins last week to St. Gabriel’s Elementary School for the students to paint. Higgins delivered more pumpkins this week to St. Margaret Mary and St. Mary Catholic Schools. Higgins runs the pumpkin stand at The Plaza.

Third graders to receive recycling book

Neenah News

The Tri-County Recycling Partnership is releasing The ABC’s of Recycling Right, a new educational resource designed to teach third-grade students the importance of recycling.

The book provides up-to-date recycling information using every letter of the alphabet, paired with interactive in-classroom activities that make learning about recycling fun and hands-on.

The ABC’s of Recycling Right is a tool for teachers to inspire the next generation of environmentally conscious citizens. Each letter introduces a new recycling concept and includes a classroom activity, helping students learn by doing and reinforcing good recycling habits from an early age.

To support local education and sustainability, the Tri-County Recycling Partnership is providing free copies of the book to all public and private third-grade class-

rooms in Winnebago, Outagamie, and Brown counties. By bringing current recycling information directly into classrooms, the partnership hopes to spark curiosity, promote responsible environmental practices and empower students to make a difference in their communities.

“We’re thrilled to bring recycling education back into the classroom in such an interactive way,” said Kelly Reyer, Education & Outreach Specialist with Winnebago County Solid Waste. “By combining up-to-date recycling information with hands-on activities, we’re helping students understand not just the ‘why’ but also the ‘how’ of recycling.”

Teachers in the three counties can expect to receive their copies soon. The ABC’s of Recycling Right is part of the Tri-County Recycling Partnership’s ongoing effort to engage students, teachers and families in building a more sustainable future.

Rita Williams Atkinson to discuss book

Neenah News

Author Rita Williams Atkinson will take part in an event at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 3 in the Neenah Public Library.

Williams Atkinson will discuss her new book Of the Struggle, an exploration of perseverance, identity and personal growth. In addition to sharing insights

from her writing, Williams Atkinson will offer practical tips for aspiring authors on how to write more consistently and stay creatively motivated.

Whether an attendee is a reader, writer or both, the library said this is a unique opportunity to connect with a passionate storyteller and gain advice on the writing process.

New oil painting series set to open at Neenah art gallery

Neenah News

A new series of large-scale oil paintings at The Hang Up Gallery of Fine Art explores vision, reflection and the paradox of clarity.

An opening reception for Only Through Glass by Wisconsin artist Erin Quick-Laughlin will be 5 to 8 p.m. today at 204 W. Wisconsin Ave. Light refreshments will be served during the reception. The exhibition will be on view through Dec. 1.

Quick-Laughlin’s six-painting series explores the tension between distortion and insight through the visual language of glass, reflection and refraction. Each work examines how people perceive one another — both literally and metaphysically — inviting viewers to question what it truly means to see.

“I create large-scale oil paintings that explore how we truly see each other — both literally and metaphysically,” Quick-Laughlin said. “My work focuses

on glass, reflection and refraction because I understand vision differently than most people. I have keratoconus, and after nearly losing my sight as a child, a breakthrough treatment in 2021 transformed not just my vision, but my entire artistic perspective.”

In Only Through Glass, Quick-Laughlin turns his unique experience of altered sight into a meditation on perception. The paintings — ranging in size from 30x20 to 40x72 inches — depict glass objects resting on reflective surfaces that evoke deep water. Rendered in luminous complementary colors, the works transform optical imperfection into revelation.

Only Through Glass offers collectors and viewers alike an opportunity to experience perception as both subject and medium — a reflection on how constraint can become a source of profound creative clarity.

Halloween carnival to feature games, activities

Neenah News

St. Margaret Mary Parish will hold a Halloween Carnival Saturday in its elementary school parking lot. The poor weather location is the school gym.

The event is slated for 10 a.m. to noon with lunch served from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Tickets are 25 cents each. Activities include games, cupcake walk, face painting and balloon twisting. Costumes are encouraged.

Guests who bring a canned good for a donation to St. Joseph’s Food Pantry will receive one game ticket per canned good.

Holiday decorations, more available at church craft sale

Neenah News

St. Mark’s Lutheran Church is hosting its annual Craft and Bake Sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at 140 S. Green Bay Road. The event is free and open to the public. Vendor booths will feature a variety of

handcrafted items, including holiday decorations. Breakfast and lunch options along with a selection of baked goods will be available for purchase. For more information, call the church office at 920-725-2828.

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Root & Runner art studio takes root in community

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

Visitors to Root & Runner can step into Neenah’s smallest professional art gallery and experience a miniature world of creativity.

The Nicholas Quarry Micro Gallery, housed inside a dollhouse that owner Emily Runnerstrom’s father built when she was three, features special lighting and scaled paper dolls, giving viewers a fresh perspective on art.

Now through Nov. 22, the micro gallery is hosting “The Forest Floor in Miniature: Collages by Mel Kolstad,” which opened with a reception last Saturday. Kolstad, of Fond du Lac, used hand-dyed papers and fabrics, along with hand and machine embroidery, to create the miniature works, all

of which are available for purchase. Root & Runner opened in June at 1131 S. Commercial Street, the former home of Cre8lab. The Cre8lab community makerspace closed in February, and Runnerstrom saw an opportunity to continue fostering creativity in the space.

Runnerstrom, an artist who grew up in Neenah and studied in Madison and London, founded the studio with support from her parents, David and JoEllen Wollangk, who are also artists.

“Having a space to offer, a space for artists to come teach, but also to teach ourselves and to try to build upon the creative community of our area, has always been one of my dreams, but also one of my parents’ dreams,” Runnerstrom said.

The name Root & Runner reflects the



Submitted photo
Participants work on art projects at Root & Runner, an art space that holds workshops, classes and lessons.



Neenah News
Root & Runner owner Emily Runnerstrom stands inside her business on South Commercial Street, which offers hands-on art experiences for the community.

studio’s mission to foster creativity and connection.

“The act of making and creating roots us in a creative community, and then when you are actively creating in that community, runners of inspiration and creativity are sent out for bigger and better things,” Runnerstrom explained.

The studio offers classes for ages 14 and up, private lessons and custom home-school tutoring. During hands-on family days, Root & Runner offers low-cost or free crafts that participants can learn together.

Among upcoming events is a Halloween craft from 12:30 to 3 p.m. Oct. 31, when Neenah district students have a half day of school. Kids of all ages can drop in with an adult to make a rope skeleton for \$5, with all supplies included.

“We’ve also got open studio days, which are completely free, where if somebody has a project that they don’t have the space for at home or they just want to get away from the distractions, we open up the stu-

dio,” Runnerstrom said.

Local artist educators teach classes, with costs ranging from about \$25 to \$150. The entire workspace can also be reserved for larger projects for a fee.

“You basically reserve it, and then the whole studio can be yours for however long you need,” she said.

Runnerstrom has also curated a selection of specialty art supplies and local art, with a focus on Wisconsin-based supplies and artists.

“All the artwork that we have is by local artists and by purchasing that they’re supporting somebody, and money stays in our community,” Runnerstrom said.

Root & Runner is open noon to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and noon to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. For more information, visit the Root & Runner website or stop by during regular hours.

“By supporting Root & Runner, you’re not just supporting us, you’re supporting the local art community as a whole,” Runnerstrom said.

Event supports school district families, scholarships

Neenah News

The 17th annual Helping Hands Art and Craft Fair will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 1 in its traditional location at the Ron Einerson Fieldhouse at Neenah Middle School, 1275 Tullar Road.

The event features over 125 vendors of handmade items as well as food, a raffle

and a used book sale. Music will be provided by the Neenah High School Touch of Class orchestra and concessions will be available.

Admission is \$2 per person. All funds go directly to Neenah Joint School District families in need as well as a yearly scholarship.

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Land Restoration

FROM PAGE 1

Merjent was able to get an Osprey nesting platform donated and installed by ATC (American Transmissions Company).

“Our goal is to continue to restore more land and forested areas,” Walter said.

He said students have been involved in the process with Merjent’s willingness to include them.

For example, students helped Merjent do soil sampling. Merjent asked the students for their input on what types of wildflowers they would like to see in the seed mix.

Blood, who is a science teacher, has been involving his students in the process through several steps.

He said Environmental Issues students last year tested the soil at different locations throughout the campus to determine the level of compaction due to the construction of the school.

“More compacted areas would need more soil prep to be ready for introducing native species,” Blood said. “By identifying areas with a looser, more appropriate soil, we were able to provide Merjent with possible ideal locations for initial restoration.”

Students in a Nature Study class surveyed the plant diversity of the original meadows that were there, which Blood said gives them a baseline of where they might be able to improve.

Students in AP Environmental Science this year tested the physical and chemical properties of the soil.

“They determined the soil type (sandy loam and sandy clay loam, for the most part) and determined that much of the soil had depleted or diminished levels of nutrients such as nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus,” Blood said.

He added students from Environmental Issues then took the findings from the AP students to develop a list of native wildflowers and grasses that would be able to survive and thrive in these soil conditions. This list of plants was sent to Merjent, who worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and other nonprofits to create a full restoration mix that will be installed late this fall.

In the next couple of years, Blood is hoping to get students involved in viewing and engaging in the installment of the native seeds; researching and measuring the changes in biodiversity, both in plants and wildlife, as the project continues; and

Seasonal outdoor warning siren testing concludes

Winnebago County’s summer outdoor warning siren testing will be concluding for the season.

Winnebago County Emergency Management conducts weekly testing of “Severe Weather Outdoor Warning Sirens” during the summer months. The last noon siren test will be Saturday.

The weekly testing will resume again in spring 2026.

MEMORIES

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continuing to assist in the planning of future restoration areas, such as the wooded areas and the numerous wetlands here.

“Ecological restoration and conservation isn’t something that has to happen far away or in a state park – it can happen right here in our communities and backyards,” Blood said. “I’m hoping they see the ‘practice’ of conservation, and not just the theory. In this case, they can see what goes into the initial research, the physical prepping of the site, the first steps of restoration, and the upkeep and maintenance through the years. This would give them a good idea of what a career in this field might look like.”

Blood is hoping they’ll see some quantifiable changes in biodiversity over the years, whether that is through improvements in plant diversity, an increase in pollinators or even the presence of more numerous and diverse mammals.

A volunteer day is planned for 9 a.m. to noon Nov. 15 to remove some of the buckthorn on the property and treat those areas to prevent it from coming back.

“We are hoping with the help of Fox Crossing to have the brush chipped down and use those chips for future projects,” Walter said.

For more information on how to get involved, contact Walter at rwalter@neenah.k12.wi.us.

A Facebook group, NHS Land Restoration, provides information about events and current progress.

An account is set up with the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation for people who want to make a donation. They would go to oshkoshareacf.org, click Give Today, then search Neenah Tomorrow Fund. Once there they would type NHS Land Restoration in the “Donation Instructions” box.

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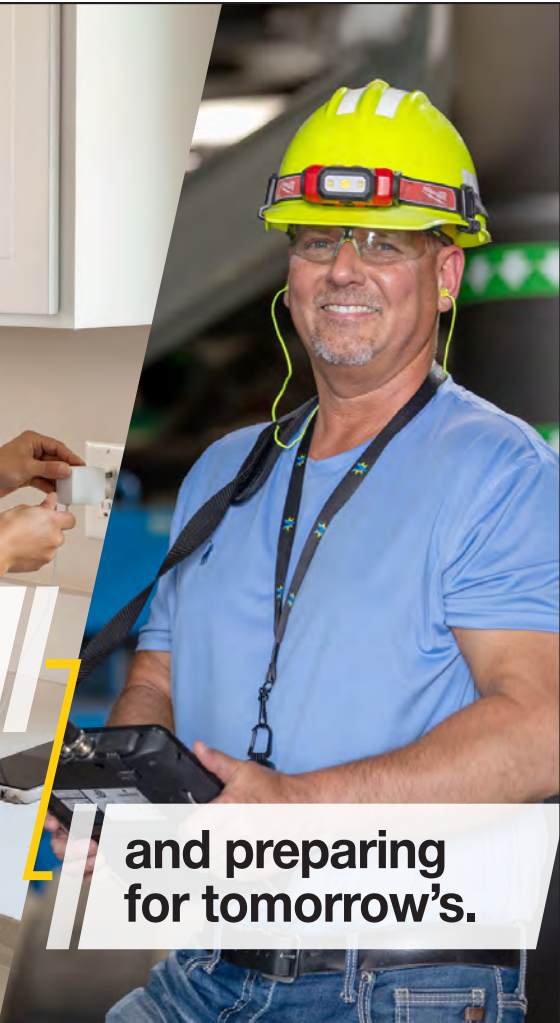
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Submitted photo

The area that is brown is the land that is being prepped to plant seed. The red-roofed building is used as an outdoor classroom.



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Photo from Neenah Police Department
City Clerk Char Nagel officially swore in new Neenah Police Officer Brittnay Westpfahl.

Officer joins Neenah Police Department

Neenah News

Neenah Police Officer Brittnay Westpfahl on Monday was officially sworn in by City Clerk Char Nagel.

Westpfahl joins the department as a lateral transfer, bringing with her over 20 years of law enforcement experience, including time spent on patrol, as a field training officer and as a detective. She previously worked for the Tomah Police Department.

Board chair appoints District 28 supervisor

Neenah News

Winnebago County Board Chairman Thomas Egan appointed Robert Gustafson of Fox Crossing Tuesday to fill the District 28 supervisor vacancy following the resignation of his son, Nate Gustafson.

Robert Gustafson was chosen for the seat over Stephanie Spellman, who served as District 10 supervisor from 2018 to 2021. Spellman resigned after moving from Neenah to Fox Crossing, which placed her outside her supervisory district.

District 28 includes parts of Fox Crossing, including wards three, six and 19. Nate

partment.

A Tomah High School graduate, Westpfahl will begin her field training immediately.

One of the key reasons Westpfahl said she chose to join the Neenah Police Department was its strong focus on community involvement. She's eager to get to know the community and is looking forward to everything Neenah has to offer.

Gustafson was elected as District 28 supervisor in 2022, re-elected in 2024 and resigned last month. He also serves as a state representative for Assembly District 55.

Robert Gustafson will serve the remainder of Nate Gustafson's term, which ends April 20. County records show that the two previously lived at the same address. Nate Gustafson and his wife recently purchased a home in Omro, outside District 28.

Winnebago County supervisors are elected to two-year terms. All 36 seats on the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors are up for election on April 7, 2026.

County changes approach to borrowing for capital projects

By Anya Kelley
NEENAH NEWS

The Winnebago County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved a plan that would authorize the borrowing of no more than \$28 million for the next two years to be used on capital improvement projects.

Capital improvement projects range from general construction, road maintenance and remodeling all the way to furnishing buildings and replacing fixtures. The board has already approved 53 capital improvement projects for 2025 coming to a total of \$19.7 million. There are 20 projects planned for 2026 totaling \$16.7 million that have not been approved yet.

The resolution presented at the County Board of Supervisors meeting by Finance Director Paul Kaiser and Managing Director of financial advising firm Baird Justin Fischer had been considered by the Personnel and Finance committee before it was brought to the Board of Supervisors.

Kaiser said Winnebago County tends to be reactive with their budget, spending from the general fund for capital projects to then borrow after replenishing the fund. In the past few years, the Personnel and Finance committee and the Board of Supervisors have worked to change the spending structure and improve their five-year financial planning process.

"The foresight of what we've been trying to do is we wanted to borrow proactively to pay for all of the capital projects with money we have borrowed so that the general fund could be invested at the interest rates to be able to get our money before interest rates start going down," Kaiser said.

Kaiser said that the goal is to invest the unassigned general fund. The resolution states that the highest amount that can be borrowed is \$28 million – \$20 million will go against the debt levy and the tax levy for the general fund, \$5 million will be used for highway improvement projects and \$3 million will be used for solid waste.

Both a debt levy and a tax levy involve property taxes but are used differently. A tax levy, or general levy, is the total amount of property taxes a local government collects to fund its operational budget, and a debt levy is used to repay borrowed money usually over a long term.

The term for repayment is 10 years, and the loan will be callable in 2032. Fischer gave a bond market update and said since spring of this year, interest rates have been volatile. Right now, volatility has cooled, and Fischer said it's a good time to get ahead of the future market. Winnebago County has a high-quality bond credit rating at double A1 due to years of positive financial health and quality spending. Fischer said this will give them a good interest rate once they go out to the market.



"This is going to reimburse the 2025 projects that have been spent, as Paul mentioned, plus fund the 2026 capital improvement projects that you've seen," Fischer said.

A hypothetical long-term CIP financing plan was provided in the meeting packet and illustrated how almost all of the county's outstanding debt would be paid off by 2034. Fischer said this long-term plan allows for capital projects to be completed without a heavy increase to the tax levy or the mill rate to avoid burdening the constituent.

"We're trying to pay it down as fast as we can within reason so your taxpayers can save on interest cost but also manage that levy year over year while they continue to fund investments within their county," Fischer said.

Supervisor George Bureau asked for clarification on the types of projects the money will be used for citing an upcoming "massive" capital project. The \$28 million will be used for the ongoing capital improvement projects the county takes on every year and will not be used for the master plan that has been in the works for the past few years. Kaiser said the master plan will likely require 20-year borrowing.

"My personal opinion ... is that we should always be establishing our borrowing for what we are approving in our budget, not for something we have already approved," Supervisor Stefanie Holt said. "And I think you all have been getting ... a pretty clear and consistent message from the Personnel and Finance Committee that we have to start being proactive and timing our borrowing to match the budget instead of looking back and saying 'well, okay now how do we refund this?'"

Supervisor Chuck Farrey said he was concerned about approving borrowing money before the board approved the capital projects they will take on for 2026 stating that that is a chance in their usual process. Farrey also asked why the county should bond \$10 million for capital projects when there is \$10 million in the ARPA fund that has been approved for county capital improvement.

"I am just trying to proactively borrow for capital projects," Kaiser said.

Supervisor Steven Binder was against the resolution and said that in his 10 years serving at the county level, they have never borrowed for more than one year at a time. He also cited the money sitting in APRA for capital improvements as a reason not to borrow for the 2026 projects.

"Why take the money from the taxpayer when you all know that they're basically struggling to make ends meet right now?" Binder said.

The resolution needed a 3/4 vote to be approved and failed 26-7-3 needing 27 votes to pass. A motion for reconsideration was made immediately, and discussion was opened again.

Supervisor Donald Nussbaum asked what happens if the resolution fails and Kaiser said he wasn't sure, but someone would likely need to bring an amendment to the floor with a new dollar amount, or no money will be borrowed. Ultimately, the reconsideration passed 29-6-1.

The County Board of Supervisors will meet again at 6 p.m. Monday to begin the budget approval process. All county meetings are livestreamed at winnebago-cowi.portal.civicclerk.com and recordings are available online.



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Photo from Fox Crossing Fire Department

New recruits

Seven individuals graduated from Recruit Academy Oct. 9 and were pinned by friends and family as official members of the Fox Crossing Fire Department. The recruits’ training included 96 hours of Firefighter I class, 56 hours of Recruit Academy at FCFD and 25 hours in the department’s mentor program. The new firefighters include Brody Stringfield, Emma Kramarczyk, Asher Kallio, Samuel Blansette, Nathan Cisneros, Spencer Vlach and Stefan Sebastiani.

Residents warned about phony debt collection scam

Neenah News

Residents are being warned about a phony debt collection scam that has continued to target people across the state, according to reports submitted to the Better Business Bureau.

The scam involves callers posing as process servers or debt collectors, claiming the recipient or a family member owes money and is facing legal action. While some calls are phishing attempts aimed at stealing personal information, others include requests for immediate payment.

The BBB issued tips in February on how to recognize phony debt collection calls, texts and mail.

“The scammer calls or texts and says that they work for a loan company, law firm or government agency, and claims to be collecting an overdue payment for you or a family member. After replying that you or your family member don’t owe money, the ‘debt collector’ starts threatening to file a lawsuit, have wages garnished, request an arrest warrant, or arrange for a court appearance thousands of miles from home,” according to the BBB.

As of Tuesday, the BBB Scam Tracker had received 10 fake debt collection reports from Wisconsin residents so far this month.

One complaint notes the scammer claimed she was from Wisconsin Debt Collectors and stated there would be a summons for a debt collection.

“She falsely claimed it was for Speedy Cash USA that I’ve never even taken a loan out for,” the complainant wrote.

Another complaint notes that the caller asked for \$600 and used aggressive tactics.

“They said I would be going to court and be paying more if I didn’t pay \$179 immediately and that if the money wasn’t in my account, I was committing bank wire transfers fraud,” the complainant wrote.

Two separate complaints involved scam callers who provided sensitive personal information including Social Security numbers and home addresses.

“She said there was going to be a summons in my county for debt collection and provided the last four digits of my Social Security number and my home address,”

Tips on how to spot debt collection scams:

- Ask for verification: Request a written “validation notice” showing the debt amount, creditor and your rights. Legitimate collectors must provide this.
- Confirm the caller: Ask for the collector’s name, company, address and phone number. Never provide personal or financial information over the phone.
- Stay calm and hang up: Don’t respond to threats, automated prompts or urgent payment demands. Scammers often request wire transfers, gift cards or digital wallet payments.
- Verify independently: Contact your loan providers directly using official contact information to confirm any claims.
- Monitor your credit: Check your credit reports for suspicious activity and place fraud alerts if necessary.

one of the complainants wrote.

“(He) called and tried to confirm my address and Social Security number which he read to me twice,” another complainant wrote. “I never confirmed but he said that this was for a debt from Bank One. I said I have never had an account with Bank One.”

The BBB wrote that these “debt collectors” don’t have any legal power and in most cases, the alleged overdue loan doesn’t even exist.

“Don’t give in and pay the money you

don’t owe, otherwise, they’ll call back for more,” the BBB wrote.

The BBB also warned in May of a similar scam involving a phony debt collector, police officer or process server. The BBB said the scammer will ask to “confirm” sensitive personal information such as date of birth, address or Social Security number.

“The people behind this scam don’t have any legal papers to deliver; they want to get their hands on your personal information to commit identity theft,” according to the BBB.



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Man due in court for stealing crosses

Neenah News

A Ripon man is due in court Monday for allegedly stealing historic crosses from St. Patrick's Cemetery in Fox Crossing.

Bradley W. Bloch, 58, was charged in August with theft of movable property greater than \$10,000 but less than \$100,000 following a Fox Crossing Police investigation.

Police began investigating in May after the cemetery's groundskeeper reported six missing cast iron crosses, each about 150 years old. The crosses are four feet tall, three feet wide and weigh about 100 pounds. Replacement estimates ranged



Bloch

from \$10,000 to \$15,000 or more due to their historic value.

The groundskeeper found one of the crosses listed for sale on Facebook Marketplace and provided screenshots to the investigator. Authorities traced the crosses to Bloch, recovering one from his residence in Ripon and the others from buyers in Kewaunee, Waupun, and DeKalb, Illinois.

Investigators used license plate and cellular data to place Bloch near the cemetery May 9 at the time of the most recent theft.

Bloch made his initial court appearance Oct. 6 and was released on a \$500 signature bond with conditions prohibiting contact with St. Patrick's Cemetery or any graveyards and forbidding the use of Facebook Marketplace or other online sale websites.

Suspect arrested after Kwik Trip armed robbery

Neenah News

A suspect in an earlier armed robbery at a Kwik Trip in the Town of Vinland was arrested Oct. 15 during a traffic stop.

According to the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, deputies responded to the armed robbery at approximately 12:30 a.m. Oct. 13. The sheriff's office said a male suspect had presented a handgun and demanded money out of the cash register.

The suspect left on foot with an undisclosed amount of money and walked across the street where he had previously parked his vehicle. With the assistance of the Oshkosh Police Department and the Neenah Police Department, the area was soon saturated with officers, but locating a suspect immediately after the incident was unsuccessful.

Through a variety of investigative resources, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office was able to identify the suspect's vehicle. It was quickly learned that the registered owner associated with the suspect's vehicle had a history of robbery convictions.

Investigators located the suspect residing in the City of Oshkosh. The suspect is identified as 58-year-old Lorenzo Wood Jr.

The Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, in conjunction with the Oshkosh Police Department and the Wisconsin State Patrol, on Oct. 15 conducted a traffic stop on the suspect's vehicle and took Wood into custody without incident. A search warrant was then executed at the suspect's residence to gather further evidence in the case.

This case is currently under review for federal prosecution.



Photo from Neenah Police Department

McGruff the Crime Dog joined Officer Joe Benoit in August during a National Night Out, one of the community outreach efforts Benoit has helped to organize as the Neenah Police Department's Community Policing Coordinator.

Benoit recognized as the First Responder of the Year

Neenah News

State Rep. Dean Kaufert last week announced that Neenah Police Department Officer Joe Benoit has been selected as the 2025 "First Responder of the Year" for the 53rd Assembly District.

Benoit's contributions were honored alongside other recipients from across the state in a public ceremony Oct. 14.

"Officer Benoit is the kind of public servant every community hopes for," Kaufert said. "He stands tall in defense of his hometown, and his dedication goes far beyond the call of duty. Whether mentoring young people or supporting fellow officers, he leads with heart, humility and a deep sense of justice."

Benoit has served in law enforcement for over 19 years, including time with the Omro Police Department before joining the Neenah Police Department in January 2020.

From the start, his colleagues recognized his tireless work ethic and his unique ability to connect with members of the community. In 2023, he was appointed as the department's Community Policing Coordinator — a role in which he has thrived, building bridges between law en-

forcement and the people they serve.

"(Joe) was born to serve — he's a helper, a mentor and a hero in the eyes of many," Kaufert added. "He's not just in the right seat on the right bus — he's driving it forward with purpose and compassion."

Kaufert plans to present Benoit with his legislative citation in person at a local ceremony in Neenah later this fall.

The First Responder of the Year award, established in 2019, shines a spotlight on the everyday heroes who serve in Wisconsin's emergency services. Each year, state legislators invite their communities to nominate individuals who go above and beyond in their roles—those who demonstrate exceptional service, integrity and a deep commitment to public safety.

Honorees represent a wide range of disciplines, including police officers, K9 handlers, sheriff's deputies, firefighters, paramedics and EMTs, reflecting the diverse and vital roles that first responders play across the state.

Along with providing each award recipient with a legislative citation recognizing their achievement, the state Assembly also passed a resolution declaring Oct. 14 as First Responders Appreciation Day.

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Driver charged in 2024 crash that killed motorcyclist

Neenah News

A Grand Chute woman has been charged in connection with a 2024 crash that killed a motorcyclist in the Town of Clayton.

Colleen Groeschel, 46, was charged Sept. 30 with homicide by negligent operation of a vehicle in the Oct. 22, 2024, crash at the intersection of County Trunk II and Clayton Avenue.

The collision between Groeschel's Jeep Grand Cherokee and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle driven by a 51-year-old man from Menasha occurred shortly before

5:40 p.m. The motorcyclist was pronounced dead at the scene.

According to the criminal complaint, witnesses told deputies they saw a black SUV traveling north on Clayton Avenue at a high rate of speed and the vehicle ran a stop sign before striking the motorcycle, which was heading east on County II and had the right of way. One witness recorded the crash on a dash camera, which showed the Jeep entering the intersection without slowing down or stopping.

Deputies identified Groeschel as the

driver and sole occupant of the Jeep. She told investigators she had just completed a package delivery nearby and was driving home to Grand Chute but had no memory of the crash itself.

Data from Groeschel's Jeep showed the brake was applied briefly about two seconds before the crash, followed by acceleration.

A download of Groeschel's phone showed she sent a Facebook Messenger message at 5:38 p.m., about five seconds before the crash. The message read, "yeah I just got done with my last delivery and now I'm headed home to eat because my sugars are dropping." The location of the

outgoing message was logged at the intersection where the crash occurred.

Groeschel sent a second message about five minutes after impact that read, "I got to go accident with Jeep."

When deputies interviewed Groeschel again in April 2025, she said she did not remember sending the message or the moments before the crash. She later located the message in her Facebook Messenger app and allowed officers to photograph it.

Groeschel is scheduled to make her initial court appearance Nov. 17. If convicted, she faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.



Photo from East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

A drone photo shows South Commercial Street during this year's \$10.8 million reconstruction project, one of the largest in Neenah's history.

Street reopens

FROM PAGE 1

The project is part of a broader city plan to revitalize the north-south Commercial Street business corridor and southern entrance to Neenah.

"With safer streets, renewed sidewalks, upgraded utilities and refreshed streetscape, we're not just repairing pavement – we're investing in a more walkable, vibrant and thriving southern gateway for Neenah," Lang said.

Even with one northbound lane open during construction, businesses reported economic impacts. Gill Liquor lost nearly 40% of its clientele, and owner Amritpal Gill said sales are still slow to recover.

"It's impacted in a big way when the roadway is shut down completely, even one way, lots of people have only a side street to come here, so they avoid this area completely," he said.

With the street reopening, Gill said he's seeing more of his regulars returning, though as of Tuesday his total sales had not yet increased.

"I'm here the last 16 years, we will be here no matter what happens," he said. "People need to support the local people here, the local community, business needs to continue here."

At Pappa's Cafe and Pub, a staff member who declined to give her name said

employee hours were reduced due to fewer customers during the street work. She added that she is "hoping and praying people will come back" now that the street has reopened.

At Neenah Vintage Mall, Narisa Graham, whose family owns the business, said summer is usually a slow season and that visits from regular customers declined only slightly during the road work, while visits from new customers picked up.

"The construction people were amazing," she said. "They made sure that one of our driveways was always open and they would communicate with us, so we still had access to the store for people to get in and we still had good traffic."

City and regional leaders said the improvements to South Commercial aim to boost safety, walkability and economic vitality along the corridor. The city thanked the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (ECWRPC) for their assistance with the project.

ECWRPC Executive Director Melissa Kraemer Badtke said the commission works with communities to move road projects forward.

"South Commercial Street is part of the regional transportation system, and this project demonstrates how strong, collaborative partners working together can move visionary plans to successful completion," she said.

Sentencing set for Neenah woman who put antifreeze in man's drink

Neenah News

A Neenah woman who admitted to putting antifreeze in a man's drink earlier this year entered no contest pleas last week to felony charges.

Mary Lopas, 65, will be sentenced Thursday to first-degree recklessly endangering safety with domestic abuse assessments and placing foreign objects in edibles, according to court records. As part of a plea agreement, prosecutors will recommend a sentence of two years in prison and two years of extended supervision on the first count, and 18 months in prison and 18 months of extended supervision on the second count, to be served concurrently.

Police were called to a home in the 200 block of Loper Court in Neenah June 11 after the 70-year-old victim reported that his drink tasted strange. The victim told officers he regularly keeps soda in a water bot-

tle and had installed cameras in the home.

Lopas is a former partner of the victim who resided in the same duplex. Footage showed Lopas coming downstairs with a bottle containing a green liquid and walking toward the area where the victim's water bottle was kept. The victim saved a sample of the drink for testing.

When officers spoke with Lopas, she initially claimed she had put laxatives and antacids in the victim's drink, but later admitted she used antifreeze, but said it was "pet safe." Documents say she told investigators she was frustrated with driving the victim to the hospital and wanted to make him sick enough to stay there.

Investigators found a gallon of antifreeze in the basement, along with antacid and a funnel. Lopas admitted she lied about using pet safe antifreeze and acknowledged she knew antifreeze could be fatal.



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Neenah schools report fewer restraints but more seclusions

By Bethanie Gengler
NEENAH NEWS

The Neenah Joint School District reported a drop in the number of students physically restrained last school year but saw an increase in seclusions, according to data presented to the school board Tuesday.

Seclusion is the involuntary confinement of a student apart from other students in an area where they are physically prevented from leaving. Physical restraint involves immobilizing or reducing the ability for a student to freely move their torso, arms, legs or head.

Under Wisconsin Act 118, the use of seclusion or restraint is prohibited except when a student's behavior presents "a clear, present, and imminent risk to the physical safety of the student or others" and when it is "the least restrictive intervention feasible."

The district recorded 43 incidents of seclusion involving 20 students in 2024-25, up from 24 incidents involving 16 students the previous year. At the same time, physical restraints fell to 27 incidents involving 13 students, down from 44 inci-

dents in 2023-24. Of those affected, 19 of the students placed in seclusion and 10 of those restrained were students with disabilities, according to the report.

Among individual schools, Horace Mann Middle School reported the highest number of incidents, with 18 seclusions and three restraints, followed by Tullar Elementary with seven seclusions and seven restraints, and Coolidge Elementary with six seclusions and five restraints. Police were not involved in any of the incidents last school year.

The data shows a continuing downward trend in physical restraints compared to previous years. Districtwide, restraints dropped from 132 in 2021-22 to 27 last school year, while the number of seclusion incidents have fluctuated during the same period.

Director of Pupil Services Valerie Hurm said the district's focus remains on preventing such incidents through training and proactive support plans. About 130 staff members across the district are trained in nonviolent crisis intervention, which focuses on de-escalation.

Power outage causes temporary middle school closure

Neenah News

Neenah Middle School was closed for the day Wednesday after a transformer blew on Tullar Road, causing a power outage.

District officials said other customers in the area were without power before it came back at the school around 8 a.m. It took a little longer for power to be restored to the rest of the neighborhood.

"We needed to make a decision early and didn't know how long it would take to come back," district spokesman Jim Strick said.

Students already headed to the school were asked to report to the cafeteria. After school activities were canceled Wednesday.

Strick said everything was expected to be good to go on Thursday.



Neenah News

Gone fishing

Fifth and sixth grade students from the Neenah Middle School Fishing Club fished Oct. 16 at Riverside Park. Club members in fifth and sixth grade fish on Thursdays, while seventh and eighth graders fish on Tuesdays.

Deadline nears to get sturgeon spearing licenses

Neenah News

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds all spearers interested in harvesting a lake sturgeon from Lake Winnebago during the 2026 sturgeon spearing season to purchase their license before Oct. 31.

There are an unlimited number of licenses available for Lake Winnebago, and both residents and nonresidents can purchase a license through the Go Wild system or at any license sales location.

All license holders must be a minimum of 12 years old. However, military personnel home on leave during the spearing season and youth who will turn 12 between Nov. 1 and the last day of the 2026 spearing season do not need to purchase their license by the Oct. 31 deadline.

The Upriver Lakes fishery (lakes Poygan, Butte des Morts and Winneconne) is managed by a preference point system and lottery that is limited to 500 permitted spearers. Successful Upriver Lakes tag ap-

plicants have already been authorized for the 2026 season and have until the start of the spearing season to purchase a license. Successful Upriver Lakes tag applicants cannot purchase a tag for Lake Winnebago.

Sturgeon spearing license sales help fund the necessary management activities on the Winnebago System, such as staffing the registration stations during the spearing season and the work during the spawning season to gather data to set the sustainable harvest caps.

The license sales also fund the large acoustic tagging project in the Winnebago System, which tracks lake sturgeon movement throughout the system and helps ensure all Winnebago lake sturgeon management decisions are made using the latest science.

The 2026 sturgeon spearing season will open on Feb. 14, 2026, and will run for a maximum of 16 days or until any of the predetermined harvest caps are met.

Drivers urged to use caution with increased deer activity

Neenah News

Winnebago County was in the top 10 of Wisconsin counties with the most crashes involving deer last year.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation Division of Wisconsin State Patrol reported 532 deer-related crashes in Winnebago County in 2024. There were more than 17,000 crashes involving deer last year across the state, killing nine people and injuring 707.

More than one-third of those crashes happened in October and November. With the changing season comes in-

creased activity from deer and a greater risk for deer related crashes. The State Patrol urges drivers to stay alert with more deer on the move during the fall rut or mating season.

"This is the time of year when we typically see the most crashes involving deer," said Wisconsin State Patrol Superintendent Tim Carnahan. "As the hours of daylight become shorter and more deer are crossing the highways, drivers should be especially cautious and scan the road ahead to prevent dangerous crashes."

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FALL CRAFT FAIR

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Neenah enters playoff showdown off loss to Hortonville

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

It wasn't the way the Neenah football team wanted to enter the playoffs.

But last Friday's 17-14 loss to Hortonville in the regular-season finale may be a positive moving forward.

"We walked in with a bad mindset and we didn't have the best week of practice either," senior linebacker Hunter Weinke said. "I think we all know that we can't do that this week. We have to play 100 percent and treat every team like the best team out there."

The Rockets (7-2) will open the post-season by hosting De Pere (5-4) in a Division 1 first-round playoff game at Rocket Stadium on Friday. The winner will face



Weinke

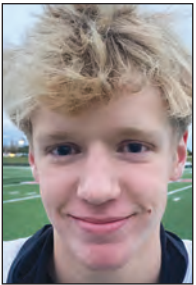
the winner of Hudson and Sun Prairie East.

The Redbirds enter the game coming off of two straight wins in which they combined for 85 points against Appleton West and Green Bay Southwest.

Quarterback Holden Woodfill has thrown for nearly 1,400 yards and 19 touchdowns this season, while receiver Sam Robb leads the team with 48 receptions for 674 yards and 11 touchdowns.

On the ground, Caden Schampers leads the team with 477 yards rushing and is averaging nearly five yards per carry.

"They spread you out and like to throw the ball. They have a really good receiver and the running back is a shifty guy and has a great burst," Neenah head coach



Shaffer

Steve Jung said. "They are a team very similar to Hortonville."

The Rockets trailed 14-0 at halftime against Hortonville but scored 14 points in the third quarter as the Polar Bears grabbed a 17-14 lead.

But Neenah – which played without starting quarterback Ashton Van Beek because of injury – was unable to overtake the Polar Bears in the fourth quarter.

Sophomore Elliot Devlin started in place of Van Beek – who is expected to return this Friday – and completed 13-of-18 passes for 115 yards while also rushing for a touchdown. But as an offense, the Rockets turned the ball over three times in the red zone and Jung said the coaches could have put the team in a better position to succeed.

"We could have been better offensive coaches wise," Jung said. "We put a lot on a young quarterback. We should have been more careful with our play calls and been fine settling for a field goal in those circumstances. In hindsight, we would have called the game a little bit differently."

Earlier in the week, the Rockets were putting that loss – which left them with a share of the Fox Valley Association title with Kimberly – behind them and were focusing on De Pere.

"This week we've been tuning everything in and getting it right," said senior offensive lineman Chet Shaffer. "They are a good football team. They are fast and strong and we have to be ready for everything they can throw at us."

Making the playoffs is nothing new for the Neenah program.

This marks the 11th straight year – in non-COVID seasons – that the Rockets have made the playoffs and their 21st ap-

pearance overall. But this appearance has a different feel to it.

In past seasons, the Rockets were likely to run into a fellow FVA opponent sometime in the opening rounds but that is not the case this year.

"This is the first time since I have been at Neenah that we haven't had a FVA team in our bracket. That was nice," Jung said. "I do like the draw we got. I'm excited about that and it's going to be different that we don't play an FVA team or Muskego in the second or third round."

Neenah is the No. 2 seed in the bracket with River Falls earning the top seed in the eight-team grouping. Chippewa Falls, Oconomowoc and Mukwonago are the other teams in the bracket.

"We get to play some different teams this year," Shaffer said. "They switched up the (grouping) this year and so it's exciting to learn some new opponents and play different teams."

It was something that Ritter said the team was hoping for.

"Before we found out who we were going to play, I think we were all hoping to play a different team we usually don't see," Weinke said. "We have learned from our mistakes and I think all of us are just excited."

Set up for a potential playoff run, now it comes down to producing on the field for the Rockets.

"Execution and taking care of the ball are the two most important things," Jung said. "The sting of (the loss to Hortonville) is hard. I'm looking forward to getting to our next game because the sting is still there. I hope our kids will look at that and say we really have to practice well and we really have to pay attention to the small things moving forward."

St. Mary Catholic looking to extend season in playoff opener

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

St. Mary Catholic head coach Rob Detterman felt his team had a good chance to make the WIAA postseason whether the Zephyrs won or lost against New Holstein last Friday.

But it certainly feels better going in off a victory.

The Zephyrs intercepted five passes and George Voss scored the go-ahead touchdown with 40 seconds remaining as St. Mary Catholic edged the Huskies, 23-20.

"We didn't want to back into the playoffs and we didn't want to lose three games in a row," Detterman said. "Making the playoffs feels good but that was also our expectation since day one. We don't want to be too excited about it but we're enjoying it."

The Zephyrs are making their first post-season appearance since 2002 and just the third WIAA playoff trip in program history. They earned a No. 6 seed in their Division 6 grouping and will travel to face third-seeded Bonduel on Friday night.

The Bears finished second in the Pack-erland Conference and enter the game with a 7-2 record. Bonduel is making its 13th straight WIAA playoff appearance and 29th postseason trip overall and features an offense that is averaging more than 44 points over its last five games and is coming off a 62-0 win over Sturgeon Bay on Friday.

Junior running back Carter Moesch is the team's leading rusher and is averaging better than 10 yards per carry. He has al-



Osgood

ready surpassed 1,000 yards for the season and has scored 17 touchdowns and he is also the team's leading receiver.

"Stopping their run is going to be really important this week because they are a run-heavy team," said junior Dominic Osgood, who had two interceptions in the win over New Holstein. "A lot of the teams we are going to play going forward are run heavy, good teams like Brillion, New Holstein and Roncalli. (Having played them) will give us some idea of what the other teams are going to do and be able to adapt better to them."

New Holstein rushed for 185 yards in the game and took a 13-7 halftime lead on the Zephyrs. St. Mary Catholic edged in front to start the fourth quarter but was trailing in the final minute as they approached the goal line.

With quarterback Tarver Trinkner battling an injury, Detterman turned to Voss when the Zephyrs got close.

"Coach just said, 'George do you want to score a touchdown,' and I was like obviously," Voss said. "It was a wildcat (formation) and I was supposed to run through the B-gap and the line did a great job blocking and ended up getting into the end zone."

"I'm more of a defensive player so I never thought I would experience something like that. It was a pretty incredible feeling."

The win certainly gives the Zephyrs a boost.

"It feels good that we can beat a competitive team like New Holstein. It feels good to



Voss

SEE **Zephyr football** ON PAGE 15

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Rockets returning to team state with high expectations

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

Making it to 13 of the last 14 WIAA Division 1 Team State Tennis Tournaments would seem to get to be a little mundane – like it’s just another regular part of the season’s schedule.

Neenah girls tennis coach Dan Grasl would disagree.

“Every time is exciting,” said Grasl, whose team is making its 22nd team state appearance overall. “It’s different groups. It’s different ways of getting there. Sometimes it’s a lot harder, sometimes it’s easier but every time getting there is exciting.”

The Rockets enter this weekend’s eight-team tournament as the No. 2 seed behind only defending state champion Brookfield East. Neenah faces Verona on Friday afternoon in a quarterfinal with the winner advancing to competition on Saturday.

The Rockets claimed state titles in 2015 and 2021.

“Personally, I get a lot more excited for team state,” said No. 1 singles player Celia Gentile. “It’s more electric when it’s a whole

team event instead of just your individual flight. So I’m very excited.”

Having all of the teammates on the court alongside each other as well as the fans rooting from above the courts makes for an interesting atmosphere at Nielsen Tennis Stadium in Madison.

For some, that can be an overwhelming situation. Others thrive in it.

“Personally, I love it. I love to hear my teammates cheering for me,” said Ella Motto, the Rockets’ No. 2 singles player. “It’s kind of like a little bit of pressure, but at the same time you don’t want to let your team down. You are playing as a team so you want to keep working and help the team.”

Gentile and Ella Motto will spearhead the singles lineup, which also includes Rachel Thomas at No. 3 singles and Lauren McDonald at No. 4 singles. All four won sectional titles, while Gentile and Ella Motto each played at the individual state tournament.

Gentile, the No. 11 seed in the Division 1 singles bracket, won her first two matches at the state tournament in straight sets before



Submitted photo
Neenah’s No. 1 doubles team of Sydney Michalkiewicz (left) and Rebekah Thomas placed fifth at the individual state meet last weekend.

falling to sixth-seeded Natalia Martinez. Ella Motto lost to 13th-seeded Alezia Stephens of Bay Port.

The doubles lineup is led by the No. 1 pairing of Sydney Michalkiewicz and Rebekah Thomas, with Ava Motto and Ceceleia Alexander playing at the No. 2 flight and Josie Kohlbeck and Evelyn Buss filling the No. 3 flight.

“Doubles is definitely a strength,” Grasl said. “Our No. 2 doubles and No. 3 doubles are so close to each other and can compete with anybody in the state. We are a deep squad but our doubles is definitely a key.”

Michalkiewicz and Rebekah Thomas are coming off a fifth-place finish at the individual state meet.

The duo won its first two matches in straight sets before falling to third-seeded – and eventual state runner-up – Sarah Neubert and Isabelle Heidenberger of Arrowhead. The Neenah duo had a match point in the third set in the loss but ended up falling 6-3, 2-6, 10-8 but came back to win the next two matches to take fifth.

“It was a great experience. It felt really good to be on the podium. We had some good matches, good opponents,” Michalkiewicz said. “We really wanted to podium. The people (seeded) above us, we had some really good matches with so we knew we were capable.”

Rebekah Thomas said making it into the top six at state was the plan all along.

“That was always our goal from the start,” Rebekah Thomas said. “Even before the season started.”

Both Ella Motto and the pairing of Ava Motto and Alexander also qualified for the individual state meet but suffered first-round losses, however, they will all be back on the court together with their teammates this weekend.

With the experience of individual state as well as past team state tournaments, playing in the unique atmosphere at Nielsen Tennis Stadium won’t be new to most of the Neenah lineup and that could be an advantage for the Rockets.

“I think it really helps us having been there already. We won’t be as nervous and

we can really just go out and play loose,” Michalkiewicz said. “Everyone can play like it’s just another match.”

Gentile, who has played at team state the last two years at No. 2 singles, knows firsthand how experience inside Nielsen can help.

“I know my freshman year I was very nervous to first play at Nielsen,” Gentile said. “It’s still nerve-racking but I think experience definitely helps and a lot of the girls on the team have experience at Nielsen. That gives us a better outlook on the tournament.”

Verona – which is led by state runner-up singles player McKenna Thorson – is making just its fifth appearance at the state meet, with the last trip coming in 2023 when the Wildcats lost in the semifinals.

The Rockets did not face Verona at any tournaments this season, but Grasl knows what his team can expect when it takes the court for their quarterfinal.

“We have played a lot of people who have played them so we looked at those matchups and their depth is not as strong as ours from what I have been able to see,” Grasl said. “Our depth is what gets us where we get almost all of the time. Depth is certainly going to be a key.

“Obviously we are not looking past anybody, but we feel confident right now. We have to be ready.”

Having played a number of the teams that are in the state field has prepared the Rockets for what they are going to face this weekend.

“Playing all of these hard teams in the actual season gets us ready for when we are going to face a hard (opponent),” Gentile said. “You know how to mentally prepare yourself and physically do what you need to do.” All of that preparation has the Rockets believing that a third title in program history is definitely within their reach.

“Whenever everyone knows they have to play their best to help the team, I feel like everyone plays better,” Ella Motto said. “We’ve been joking about it, like we’re going to be state champs, but I really think we can do it.”

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ALL ARE WELCOME

Auth, Schneider eye another title at team state tourney

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

The St. Mary Catholic doubles team of senior Adel Schneider and sophomore Vivie Auth finished off their second state title in two years last weekend at the WIAA Division 2 individual state tennis meet.

Now the duo is aiming for two state titles in two weekends.

Schneider and Auth will lead the entire Zephyr squad into their first team state tournament appearance since 2004, when St. Mary Catholic tussles with Altoona in a Division 2 semifinal on Saturday morning at the Nielsen Tennis Stadium in Madison.

“I’m so excited for team state. It’s a great way to end my senior season,” Schneider said. “I’m so happy that it’s this group of girls that I get to go with. It’s the best team bonding experience you can have.”

Auth and Schneider were once again the top seeds in the Division 2 doubles bracket and had not lost a match for the second straight season.

But as confident as the duo was, that didn’t mean there weren’t some nerves doing into the tournament.



Blaney

“There was definitely more pressure knowing that we had a title to defend but overall we were pretty calm,” Auth said. “We had a couple of iffy games but we always came back.”

Auth and Schneider won all four matches in straight sets to claim their second title and never lost more than two games in any set they played. The pairing topped Kenosha St. Joseph’s Ava Miller and Parker Van Dusan 6-2, 6-1 in the title match.

“I’m super proud of them,” head coach Lizzy Auth said. “They stayed calm, they did their thing. I was in awe watching them. They have such good chemistry on the court. It just all came together.”

For the duo, it was just as exciting to win a second title as it was claiming last year’s crown.

“It feels great. I’m super proud of Vivie and I in that all of the hard work we put in we were able to show on the tennis court,” Schneider said. “That was really rewarding, especially with all of your friends and family there.”

St. Mary Catholic’s No. 2 doubles team of Nadia Alexander and Lorelai Miller lost a hard-fought three-set match in the first round, falling to Lake Mills’ Mollie Cooper and Grace Ninneman, 7-5, 1-6, 10-8.

Senior Erin Blaney also qualified for the state meet but ran into a tough opening-round draw and fell to Kohler’s Eila Webber, 6-1, 6-4.

“It was really special for Erin,” Lizzy Auth said. “She hasn’t grown up playing tennis. She only started her freshman year, so to make it as far as she did it was an amazing accomplishment. I think the whole team was proud of her.”



Submitted photo

The St. Mary Catholic doubles team of Vivie Auth (left) and Adel Schneider captured their second straight Division 2 doubles title at the WIAA Individual State Tennis Tournament last weekend in Madison. The Zephyrs will compete at the team state tournament on Saturday.

Playing at the individual state tournament also gave Blaney the experience of taking the courts inside Nielsen Tennis Stadium and that experience should be a benefit this weekend.

“(The experience) will help out a lot,” Blaney said. “It will get some of the nerves out. It will also help me hype up the rest of the team so they won’t be nervous.”

St. Mary Catholic advanced to the team state tournament by taking first at the Kohler Sectional, and the effort showcased the depth of the team as all seven flights placed at the sectional.

All three doubles teams won titles as Elsa Rossmeissl and Bree Pauly at the No. 3 flight joined Auth and Schneider and Alexander and Miller as sectional champions.

Halle Janssen at No. 3 singles and Kaylee Sommerfeld at the No. 4 flight each added second places, while Ella Chier finished third at No. 2 singles and Blaney was fourth at No. 1 singles.

“To have 10 girls who can practice together and no one holds us back is a great thing,” Lizzy Auth said. “I think they are going out and play their best tennis.”

Those who competed at individual are just happy to be sharing the court with all of their teammates once again.

“We have a really strong team overall. Everyone is a huge part. We couldn’t have done it without everyone,” Vivie Auth said. “I’m super excited to be playing alongside all of my teammates one more time at state. It will definitely take a lot of pressure off of us, too.”

The winner of the match will advance to play either top-seeded Edgewood or Shorewood on Saturday afternoon. That’s where the Zephyrs hope to be.

“Obviously, the first match we have to get it done. We can’t win it if we don’t even make it to the finals,” Schneider said. “Last week, a lot was in Vivie and my control. If we won, we moved on, but it’s different this week. We are going to focus on what we can do to help the team and I know that all of the other girls are going to do the same to do their part to be one of the four wins.”

Lizzy Auth likes the match up with Altoona and used the individual state tournament to get a glimpse of the Railroaders top players.

“Of course I did. I did watch and I think we are going to have some great matches,” said Lizzy Auth, who was an assistant coach on the St. Mary Catholic boys team that advanced to team state in 2022. “I feel a little more prepared for what goes on this time. We are trying to keep doing what we have been doing and have some focused practices this week.”

And the Zephyrs are hoping for a successful trip to Madison.

“I think we have a good chance of winning,” Blaney said. “I think we will be able to work better as a team together and it will be like any other match at school.”

That would mean that Auth and Schneider would collect their second title in as many weeks.

“(Adel and I) want to end our season strong so it’s super important that we come out aggressive and hopefully end the season undefeated,” Vivie Auth said. “It is really nice that we could possibly have another state championship.”

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Mulroy hopes to finish swimming career with flourish

By Steve Clark
NEENAH NEWS

Neenah High School senior Anna Mulroy knows the end is coming.

The latest in the long list of talented Rocket swimmers can see that her high school career only has a few competitions left before she has to take off that Neenah swimsuit and swim cap for the final time.

“It definitely will be tough. I think it will be sad,” Mulroy said before a practice last week. “I think about it a little bit and just having seen all the seniors go before me. It’s like it’s my turn now.”

Mulroy already is a three-time state qualifier, who competed in both the 100-yard butterfly and 100-yard backstroke last season. She swam on state-qualifying relays as both a freshman and sophomore.

Mulroy is focused on capping her career in proper fashion and finish things off with a trip to Waukesha in November.

“(Making it to state a fourth time) is very important for me. That’s my biggest goal to make it to state individually,” Mulroy said. “To finish up well my senior year would be a good closing for me.”

Mulroy’s best events are the butterfly and backstroke although she came into high school swimming more of the free-style events. She finished in the top 10 at sectionals in both the 50-yard freestyle and 100-yard freestyle as a freshman and was a strong finisher the 50-yard freestyle along with the 100-yard butterfly at sectionals as a sophomore.

“My freshman and sophomore year I was definitely more on the freestyle side,” Mulroy said. “A lot of people just starting to swim or are younger start with freestyle and then find their specialty and get better at that as time goes on.”

Mulroy said she started swimming when she was “six or seven years old” but didn’t compete in a lot of big meets growing up.

“I definitely was not very good at it

Senior Standout



when I started,” Mulroy said. “I only started to feel like I was starting to get good around my eighth-grade year and into my freshman year.”

Practicing more helped Mulroy improve her times but it wasn’t just improving the physical side of the sport.

Having belief in herself was just as important as fine-tuning her strokes.

“Definitely gaining confidence helped me and that’s something I still struggle with,” Mulroy said. “Getting used to trying new events, trying new things every day at practice and just pushing myself harder and harder every day was important.”

When Mulroy did step onto the Neenah team, she was joining a group with a host of established swimmers.

She admits to being a little intimidated early in her freshman season but she learned a lot that first year and was thankful for the opportunity to swim with such talented teammates.

“As the season went on, I realized that I got the opportunity to swim with such an amazing team and that made me a stronger swimmer,” Mulroy said. “Just to see other people swimming at that top level. It was just a really great experience for me.”

Now, a senior, Mulroy is tasked with serving a leadership role with the Rockets and it’s a responsibility that she takes pride in.

And it’s something she learned as she grew in the program.

“The leaders we had always led by ex-



Neenah senior Anna Mulroy is on pace to become a four-time state qualifier for the Rockets this season.

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Prep roundup

CROSS COUNTRY

Zilm leads Neenah girls to FVA crown

Sam Zilm paced the field and the Rockets placed all five runners in the top 10 as they walked away with the girls team title at the Fox Valley Association meet held last week at Countryside Golf Course.

Zilm, a freshman, not only won the meet but she also set a record in the process. Her time of 17-minutes, 40.5-seconds was the fastest ever since the conference went to the 5,000-meter distance for the girls in 2014. Anna Fauske of Kaukauna had the previous mark of 18:10, set in 2017 and 2019.

Zilm becomes the second straight individual champion from Neenah, as well, following up Mazie Olkowski’s win from last season.

Zilm finished less than a second ahead of Appleton North’s Eva Busch but the two were the only runners to finish under 18 minutes at the meet.

Behind Zilm, the Rockets next three runners finished in a row with Elsa Gruber taking sixth, Izzy Malloy finishing in seventh and Natalie Schultz placed eighth. Elsa Weiland finished close behind in 10th place.

Maddie Schoonover (12th) and Natalie Willes (15th) gave Neenah all seven runners in the top 15.

The Rockets finished with a team score of 32 points to easily outdistance runner-up Appleton North, which finished with 70 points. It was the third straight FVA title for the Neenah girls.

The Neenah boys finished second to Kimberly at the conference meet and were led by individual champion Zach Verhagen. The Rocket senior finished about four seconds ahead of Carter Crowe of Oshkosh West to earn his second straight individual FVA title.

Verhagen becomes the first back-to-back individual champion for the Rock-



Submitted photo

Neenah freshman Sam Zilm won the girls race at the Fox Valley Association meet last week in a record-setting time. Zilm helped the Rockets win their third straight FVA title.

ets since Austin Henderson won titles in 2021 and in the COVID-altered season of 2020. Matt Meinke also won two consecutive titles in 2016 and 2017.

Oliver Steiner was the next finisher for the Rockets in 13th place, while Elliott Drake placed 15th and Gideon Benner was 21st. Brayden Willis rounded out the scoring runners in 33rd place.

Staner leads Zephyrs at Big East meet

Fritz Staner grabbed a top-10 finish to lead the St. Mary Catholic boys to a seventh place finish overall at the Big East

Conference meet at Two Rivers last Saturday.

Staner placed 10th among the 80 runners, while Ethan Auer and Brady DeLeeuw placed 20th and 21st, respectively, for the Zephyrs. Leo Gruber in 65th and Brandon DeBraal in 69th rounded out the runners for St. Mary Catholic.

The Zephyr girls were led by Audra Post in 21st place and Claire Higgins in 27th place. Claire Lisinski added a 51st place finish, while Alice Troian Mello was 55th.

St. Mary Catholic did not have a full team to place in the team standings.

Kohler won both the girls and boys team titles.

SOCCER

Rockets drop OT contest in WIAA tourney

Third-seeded Neenah was stunned in the first round of the WIAA Tournament as the Rockets dropped a 2-1 decision in overtime to Menomonee Falls on Tuesday night.

SWIMMING

Neenah swims past Oshkosh West

The Rockets posted 1-2 finishes in three different events and rolled up a 115-71 victory over Oshkosh West in a Fox Valley Association dual meet on Tuesday.

Anna Mulroy and Ellen Farrell posted a 1-2 finish in the 200-yard individual medley, while Bridget Bloomhuff and Sophie Wypiszynski finished first and second, respectively, in the 100-yard backstroke.

The Rockets also grabbed the top two places in the 200-yard medley relay with Mulroy, Bloomhuff, Elisabeth Hang and Breleigh Maurer swimming on the winning team.

Mulroy picked up a second win in the 100-yard freestyle for the Rockets, while joining Hang, Wypiszynski and Ann Ben-

thein in winning the 200-yard freestyle relay.

Maurer in the 50-yard freestyle, Hang in the 100-yard butterfly and Sydney Hansman in diving also picked up wins in the meet.

Adding second-place finishes were Hang in the 200-yard freestyle, Maurer in the 500-yard freestyle and Aubrey Murwar in the 100-yard breaststroke. The Rockets also took second in the 400-yard freestyle relay.

BOYS VOLLEYBALL

Neenah tops Hortonville in four sets

Eli Yoder finished with 14 kills and eight digs as the Rockets bounced back from a first-set loss to beat Hortonville on Monday night, 24-26, 25-16, 25-6, 25-13.

Trevor Ricketts added nine kills in the match for Neenah, while Sam Printz finished with six.

Levin Steckling finished with six aces and Cam Diekfuss added five as Neenah finished with 15 aces overall. Diekfuss also led the team with 15 assists.

Malachi Vang also chipped in eight digs for the Rockets.

On Saturday, the Rockets went 3-2 as hosts of a tournament, posting wins over Whitefish Bay, Arrowhead and Kenosha Tremper, while falling to Kimberly and Cedarburg.

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

Neenah wraps up regular season at tourney

The Rockets finished 3-1 at the Luxemburg-Casco tournament on Saturday to close out the regular season.

Neenah scored wins over Sevastopol, Wisconsin Lutheran and Waukesha West but lost its final match of the tournament to Middleton.

Senior standout

FROM PAGE 14

ample which is what I try to do. They always were motivated and that made me more motivated, too,” Mulroy said. Working with your team is the most important thing, even if it’s something that you are doing individually. Communicating with everybody to make sure everyone is on the same page and knowing that there are other people there to support you in whatever you do is what I have learned from swimming.”

When Mulroy’s season ends she will have a chance to pursue another favorite activity.

She enjoys downhill skiing during the winter months and has even traveled to Colorado with her family to experience some of the taller and more treacherous ski hills.

“I love to ski. It’s just kind of a fun activity I do with my family and friends,” Mulroy said. “Skiing and swimming are definitely different things.”

Before she can hit the slopes, though, Mulroy – who isn’t planning on swimming competitively in college – has her senior season to finish up.

With conference and sectional meets approaching fast a hopefully a return trip to state on the calendar, she definitely has something to look forward to. Even if it will be tough when it’s over.

“The focus definitely changes this time of year,” Mulroy said. “You are more focused on your best events during practice rather than just doing an (individual medley). It’s more individual when it gets to the championship meets.

“I’m very proud of being part of this team. Our tradition is very long and we’ve been a very good team, so it’s special to be a part of that.”

Zephyr football

FROM PAGE 11

beat a good team like that and that energy just carries on into the next week,” Osgood said. “We are all happy to be (in the play-offs) but we all want more. All of us want to show that we can do more than just make the playoffs, that we can go farther.”

Detterman expects Trinkner to be back healthy to face Bonduel and believes the Zephyrs will have an advantage in the game they haven’t had before this season.

St. Mary Catholic has more size and experience on the offensive and defensive lines than its opponent and he hopes the

Zephyrs can use that to their advantage.

“We want to be aggressive and we want to win the line of scrimmage,” Detterman said. “At this point of the year you have your identity. You have your main plays that really matter and that’s what you stick with. You stick with what you know and you do what you do and you figure out how to do it against them.”

It’s an approach that the Zephyrs have taken all season.

And now they get to do it in the playoffs.

“I think we are set up for this,” Voss said. “We just have to go out and prove it. The biggest hill to climb is believing it. And if we believe it, I think we can win this thing.”

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