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## Lighthouse fundraiser reaches goal

By Bethanie Gengler  
NEENAH NEWS

The City of Neenah has reached its \$280,000 fundraising goal for the restoration and preservation of the historic Kimberly Point Lighthouse.

The city announced last week that more than 140 donors, referred to as “Beacon Keepers,” supported the project and an

anonymous donor established a perpetual care fund for the lighthouse. The fund will provide long-term financial support to maintain and preserve the lighthouse so that it remains a feature of Neenah’s waterfront.

“This is a great moment for our community,” said Mayor Jane Lang. “Reaching our fundraising goal and securing a per-

petual care fund ensures that the Kimberly Point Lighthouse will continue to shine as a symbol of Neenah’s history, pride, and commitment to preservation.”

The lighthouse overlooks the headwaters of the Fox River and Lake Winnebago. The total estimated cost of renova-

SEE **Goal met** ON PAGE 7

### INSIDE



**On the courts**  
Neenah boys suffer another close loss  
Page 9

**In the courts**  
Neenah PD officers facing lawsuit  
Page 3



Photo by David Hall

### Winter fun

Families enjoy roasting marshmallows, sledding and warming up with hot chocolate Saturday during the Washington Park Winter Festival, an annual event put on by Neenah Parks and Recreation that celebrates outdoor winter fun for all ages.

## New high school club connects different generations

By Dave Gill  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

They may be separated by 70 years of age or so, but when a group of Neenah High School students make it a mission to reach out to older generations for meaningful interaction, it becomes evident that they have something very much in common with their elders: the thirst to learn from each other.

Last year around winter break, a group of NHS students created a new club called Senior Smiles in an effort to bring younger and older generations together for social interaction and mutual learning opportunities.

“Our goal is to make a lasting impact in many ways, and interviewing seniors has become one of the most rewarding parts of our work,” said club president and junior Olivia Bushman. “At school we have some-

thing called ‘Star Time,’ where we will host presentations of our interviews” to other interested students.

According to Bushman, there are about 40 members participating in Senior Smiles, among those being fellow founding members and juniors Evelyn Buss and Delilah Hein as well as senior Hayden Ahlswede.

“People forget how special it is to connect with the older generations to take in their knowledge and wisdom that can be passed down,” said Buss during a Senior Smiles gathering Sunday at the Highlands at Mahler Park in Neenah.

In addition to interviewing seniors at facilities such as the Highlands, Hein mentioned that the Senior Smiles club has also organized playing bingo at CopperStone Assisted Living in Fox Crossing, a Packers

SEE **Senior Smiles** ON PAGE 8



Photo by Dave Gill

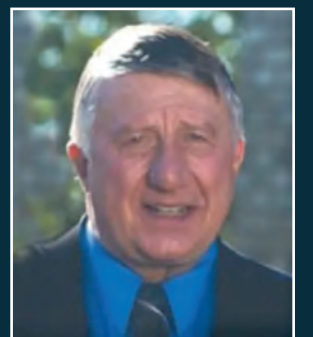
Seated from left to right are Highlands at Mahler Park resident Catriona Mackinnon, Catriona’s friend Mory Wrase, Highlands employee Debbie Griffith, and residents Werner Kuehn and his brother Hasso Kuehn. Standing behind them, left to right, are Neenah High School Senior Smiles Club members Evelyn Buss, Delilah Hein, Hayden Ahlswede and Olivia Bushman.

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Website: www.neenahnews.com

**News tips and story ideas**  
submit@neenahnews.com

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A \$50 annual membership supports receiving the newspaper weekly. Call 920-486-1616 or visit [www.neenahnews.com/product/membership/](http://www.neenahnews.com/product/membership/)

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Advertising deadline is noon Friday for the following Friday. The classified line ads deadline is 4 p.m. Tuesday for Friday.

### Publisher

Karen Schneider, 920-858-6407  
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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](http://www.neenahnews.com).

Neenah News is owned by Winnebago Media Group, Inc., 36 Broad St. Suite 300, Oshkosh, WI, 54901. 920-385-4512.

# Connecting Neenah through local news

When we were first invited to consider launching a local newspaper in Neenah, the message from community members was simple and powerful: every neighboring community had a trusted local paper — why not Neenah?

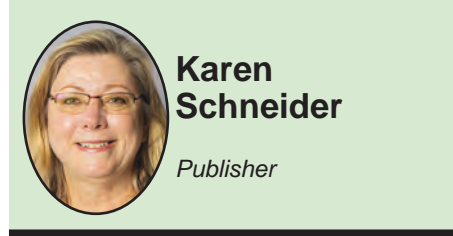
Neenah is a city defined by civic pride and community involvement. Being welcomed into this community and trusted with telling its stories was an honor we did not take lightly.

From the beginning, the Neenah News was created to deliver accurate, relevant reporting on the issues that affect daily life — from city government and schools to business growth, community events and the people who make Neenah unique.

That same belief led to the creation of Winnebago Media Group.

Winnebago Media Group brings together the Neenah News, Oshkosh Herald and Winneconne News to clearly explain why independent, local journalism matters and to help communities who value it understand how to support it.

In Winnebago County, local news



**Karen Schneider**  
Publisher

serves both a local and a connective role. Countywide issues affect all of us, while city-focused reporting ensures each community maintains its own voice. The Neenah News is committed to striking that balance.

One of our earliest commitments was accessibility. Today, the Neenah News is mailed free to 100 percent of homes in the 54956 ZIP code, ensuring every household has access to trusted local information.

That access matters — but it also comes with rising costs. Printing, postage and journalism require ongoing investment. Through Winnebago Media Group, we are being transparent about those realities and inviting readers, businesses

and community leaders to help sustain local journalism so the paper can remain free in this market.

Local leaders understand the value of that connection.

As Tim M. Bergstrom, CEO and President of Bergstrom Automotive, shared, “Community newspapers don’t just report the news — they help build, protect and celebrate the community itself. Neenah News helps ensure our special community stays connected and strong for future generations.”

Independent, local journalism strengthens civic life. It encourages informed participation and preserves the stories that define a community. Through Winnebago Media Group, we are recommitting to that mission and creating clearer ways for those who value it to support it.

Thank you for welcoming the Neenah News into your homes. I hope you’ll continue to read, share and support local journalism as we move forward together.

**Karen Schneider**

Publisher, Winnebago Media Group

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This position is perfect for someone with good writing skills interested in reporting on the community or an up-and-coming talent wanting to make an impact locally. Former writers looking to return to the profession or people with prior school newspaper writing experience encouraged to apply.

There’s a lot going on and topics of interest range from government, education, human interest, court/crime, events and more.

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# Calendar of events

## Friday, Jan. 16

Friendly Puzzle Competition, 6 p.m., Fox Crossing Community Center, 1000 Valley Road

Valley Christian Middle School Theatre presents The Snow White Variety Show, 7 p.m., Calvary Bible Church, 1450 Oakridge Road

## Saturday, Jan. 17

First Coffee Run of the season, 8 a.m., The Plaza and Globe Coffee, 229 W. Wisconsin Ave.

New Springs Christian Academy Fundraiser, 10:45 a.m., Evolution Cycle Studio, 1350 W. American Drive

NHS Jazz Stompin’ at the Savoy, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Performing Arts Center

## Friday, Jan. 23

Snowshoeing and Animal Tracking Hike, 1 p.m., Fox Crossing Municipal Complex, 2000 Municipal Drive, Grades 1-5

Winter Skate Night, 4 p.m., The Plaza and Globe Coffee, 229 W. Wisconsin Ave.

Batsu Dinner and Comedy Show, 6 p.m., Bridgewood Resort Hotel, 1000 Cameron Way

## Saturday, Jan. 24

Start Your Adventure, 10 a.m., Neenah Public Library

## Thursday, Jan. 29

NHS Rocket Players presents “The Snow” by Finegan Kruckemeyer, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Black Box Theater

## Friday, Jan. 30

Fox Crossing Parks & Recreation Daddy Daughter Winter Formal, 5:30 p.m., Bridgewood Resort, 1000 Cameron Way

Z Cabaret, 7 p.m., Jane Bergstrom Fine Arts Education Center

NHS Rocket Players presents “The Snow” by Finegan Kruckemeyer, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Black Box Theater

## Saturday, Jan. 31

Z Cabaret, 7 p.m., Jane Bergstrom Fine Arts Education Center

NHS Rocket Players presents “The Snow” by Finegan Kruckemeyer, 7 p.m., Neenah High School Black Box Theater

# Neenah officers face lawsuit over arrest

## Two defendants are now on Neenah's force

By Bethanie Gengler  
NEENAH NEWS

The City of Neenah discussed litigation Monday in closed session involving a lawsuit against three police officers – two of whom are now employed by Neenah – over alleged excessive force during an arrest in Menasha in February 2023.

The lawsuit was filed by Cordell Howze, who was convicted in 2024 of first-degree intentional homicide, arson and being a felon in possession of a firearm in the killing of 31-year-old Milwaukee resident Cashay Henderson. The case alleges that officers used excessive force during his arrest at Menasha's Hart Park in February 2023. Officers recovered a handgun that Howze had with him during the arrest.

The arrest involved police from Neenah, Menasha and the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office. Neenah

officers initiated a traffic stop on Howze's vehicle and he fled into Menasha, exited the vehicle and walked into a nearby park. Body camera video of the arrest shows a police canine, Heimo, being released. Shortly after, the dog appears to bite a police officer, knocking him to the ground. Officers struggled to regain control of Heimo before he latched onto Howze. Multiple officers deployed tasers simultaneously while attempting to subdue Howze, and one officer struggled for nearly a minute to get the dog to release him.

Two of the officers named in the lawsuit are now employed by Neenah, while the third remains with Menasha. One of the current Neenah officers, Derrick Rotta, was previously investigated by Menasha police for alleged racist and sexist conduct, according to The Badger Project.

The Badger Project obtained a 64-page internal report describing Rotta as "the most racist person at the police department," which included claims that he said Adolf Hitler had been "demonized" and wasn't a bad guy, along with allegations of sexist and homophobic remarks. Rotta's resignation agreement required Menasha to discontinue the investigation without issuing a formal conclusion.

A year before resigning from Menasha, Rotta fatally shot 43-year-old Kenneth Blevins in October 2023. Blevins was armed with two knives and advanced toward Rotta as he exited a residence. Winnebago County District Attorney Eric Sparr later ruled that Rotta's use of deadly force was justified.

Rotta resigned from Menasha in October 2024 and was hired by Neenah in January 2025. Six months later, Neenah Police hired Jason Eake, another Menasha officer involved in the Howze arrest.

Neenah Police Chief Aaron Olson told The Badger Project that Rotta has demonstrated "exemplary conduct" while at

Neenah and characterized comments he made while at Menasha as "gallows humor."

Olson told Neenah News last week that the department conducts "extremely thorough and comprehensive background investigations" on all officers, including polygraph and psychological exams.

"Based on the results of those evaluations, I was and remain confident in the hiring of both Officer Rotta and Officer Eake," Olson said. "Since hiring both of these officers, they have both been exceptional, and I have only received positive feedback from citizens and staff."

Olson declined to answer questions about the lawsuit involving Rotta and Eake.

The attorney representing the three officers in the Howze lawsuit is from the Milwaukee law firm Wirth & Baynard, which also represented Neenah in a 2015 federal civil rights case. In that incident, five people held hostage at Eagle Nation Cycles alleged that police treated them like criminals rather than victims, claiming they were detained and arrested without prob-

able cause or a warrant. A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit in 2023, ruling that the officers had qualified immunity.

City Attorney David Rashid said Neenah is not providing legal defense to the officers named in the Howze lawsuit and does not anticipate financial liability related to it. He said the city met in closed session to discuss the lawsuit this week "because it involves pending litigation, wherein two of our current officers are named defendants."



Eake



Rotta

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Photo from St. Mary Catholic Schools

## Robotics competition

St. Mary Catholic High School was transformed Saturday into a robotics battlefield. The Zephyrs hosted area high schools including Neenah, Menasha, Winneconne and more for an annual VEX VS robotics competition. Zephyrs Robotics is gearing up for the state competition, which will take place March 6 and March 7 in Green Bay.

## Rocket Players presents winter play 'The Snow'

Neenah News

Neenah High School's Rocket Players will host four shows of "The Snow" by Finegan Kruckemeyer for its annual winter play Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 in the school's Black Box Theater.

Tickets are on sale at rocketplayers.com. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors (online fees apply). Shows are Jan. 29 to Jan. 31 at 7 p.m. each night and at 2 p.m. Feb. 1.

The show runs about 60-80 minutes and is described as "a delightful fable about community and connection."

When an epic snowfall imprisons the residents of the tiny village of Kishka, young Theodore Sutton proposes the villagers build a catapult to fling him and six of the village's bravest and strongest out in search of a solution. The catapult hastily assembled, Theodore and the heroes are launched over the snow and into the grandest of adventures.

The description from the school said, "Whimsical and humorous, dark and mysterious, heartfelt and sincere, this play weaves a fantastical Grimmsian tale for the entire family."

# Scholarship applications are open for local trades students

Neenah News

Winneconne Thrift and Gift has opened applications for its 2026 scholarships, marking the sixth year the organization has partnered with the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation to support local students pursuing careers in the trades at a Wisconsin technical college.

Over the past five years, 10 students from the Neenah, Valley Christian, Oshkosh, Omro, Menasha and Winneconne school districts have been awarded scholarships. Unlike many traditional programs, this scholarship does not require minimum GPAs or standardized test scores.

"Students pursuing the trades often demonstrate valuable skills that can't always be measured by a grade or an exam," said Cindy Hendren, president of Win-

neconne Thrift and Gift, 911 E. Main St. in Winneconne. "Our goal is to support students who need financial assistance to pursue careers they are passionate about — careers that also provide a sustainable living."

For the 2026 graduating class, three \$1,000 scholarships will be awarded. Applicants must demonstrate financial need, be a graduating high school senior in Winnebago County and plan to pursue a trade program at a Wisconsin technical college.

The application deadline is Feb. 13. Applications are administered through the Fox River Scholarship Center, hosted by the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation. Interested students can begin the process by adding the scholarship to their application "basket" on the Fox River Scholarship Center website.

## Business news roundup

**Jewelers Mutual Group** announced the acquisition of EventGuard, a division previously part of the licensed insurance agency Indemn, specializing in event insurance coverage in the event and wedding space. JM Insurance Agency Partners will operate the program through the insurance carrier and expert in event coverage, Markel Group Inc., harnessing generative AI to expand its insurtech solutions and offer event liability and cancellation insurance, including wedding coverage and other programs to meet customers' evolving needs.

**Fox Communities Credit Union** has

promoted Jared Anderson to director of cards and Melissa Harper to assistant vice president of mortgage processing and closing. Anderson's previous position at Fox was business intelligence analyst. The director of cards is a dual-function leadership role responsible for both the strategic development of cards and the operational oversight of card services within the Member Payment Systems department. Harper started at Fox as a mortgage loan processor. As AVP of mortgage processing and closing, Harper will be responsible for providing strategic leadership and influence over the Mortgage Loan Processing and Closing functions.

# BATSU!

## January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026

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# Community Center Raffle

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### Tailgate Party for the Big Game Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026

Doors Open at 11:00 a.m. at Bridgewood - 1000 Cameron Way, Neenah, WI

1<sup>st</sup> - Jordan Love Salute to Service Autographed Helmet & Framed Military Jersey

2<sup>nd</sup> - Josh Jacobs Autographed Framed Jersey      3<sup>rd</sup> - \$1000 Cash

4<sup>th</sup> - Getaway Weekend at Dillman's Bay Resort, Minoqua, WI

5<sup>th</sup> - 4 Brewer Tickets to 2026 Opening Day

6<sup>th</sup> - 2 Packer Tickets to a 2026 Regular Season Home Game of Your Choice

7<sup>th</sup> - 4 Pack Dinner Cruise for Fin & Feather, Winneconne, WI

8<sup>th</sup> - \$100 Cash    9<sup>th</sup> - \$100 Cash    10<sup>th</sup> - \$100 Cash

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# Neenah student selected to US Senate Youth Program

Neenah News

Neenah High School senior Nina Bhattacharjee has been chosen as a Wisconsin delegate to the U.S. Senate Youth Program March 7-14 in Washington, D.C.

The program, which began in 1962, selects two of the highest-achieving students from each state to meet and learn from the highest level elected and appointed officials in Washington. The delegates attend briefings and meetings with senators, the president, a justice of the Supreme Court, cabinet members, federal agency leaders and senior members of the national media. At least 17 military officers serve as mentors for the students during the week.



**Bhattacharjee**

The students also receive a \$10,000 undergraduate college scholarship. The event has been fully funded by the Hearst Foundation since its inception. Selections are made through a competitive merit-based

selection process held at the state departments of education nationwide.

Bhattacharjee has competed in numerous national debate tournaments. She has been invited to compete in the Tournament of Champions in Lexington, Ky. for three straight years. In eighth grade, she was the first Wisconsin middle school student to compete in the Middle School National Tournament in debate, finishing national runner-up in congressional debate. Bhattacharjee is a four-year student representative to the Board of Education and also participates in orchestra, National Honor Society and student government. She is president of Neenah High School's Key Club.

Bhattacharjee is the fourth Neenah High School student to be selected as a delegate in the 64-year history of the event, joining Jill Wuethrich in 1986, Charles Kidd in 1988 and Parker De Deker in 2023.

To qualify for the program, students must hold or have held student body office or another elected or appointed position in their communities and show academic interest and aptitude in government, history and politics.

## Z Cabaret to benefit St. Mary Catholic Schools

Neenah News

Tickets are available for Z Cabaret, the annual fine arts fundraiser benefiting K-12 visual and performing arts curricular and enrichment programming at St. Mary Catholic Schools.

This year, Z Cabaret brings a royal twist to the Jane Bergstrom Fine Arts stage for two consecutive nights of delectable bites,

cocktails and entertainment provided by Zephyr Queens, Kings, Princes and Princesses, alongside supporting artists.

Guests are invited to come to court in regal garb on Jan. 30 and Jan. 31. Doors will open each evening for guests age 21 plus at 6 p.m., with performances beginning at 7 p.m. Each night will offer its own uniquely majestic experience.



Neenah Historical Society photo

## Skating lessons

Figure skating lessons were a popular class offered by Neenah Parks and Recreation in the 1950s. All youngsters who could skate backwards and forwards were eligible to sign up for classes held at the Green. Groups were kept small and were taught basic figures, glides and combinations.



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eat out 3 or more times during Restaurant Week to win this fun tumbler! While supplies last.



Scan here for details on Oshkosh Restaurant Week.

Follow **Oshkosh Restaurant Week**: [f](#) [@](#) or visit [DiscoverOshkosh.com](https://DiscoverOshkosh.com)

No tickets or pre-registration are required for Restaurant Week, but reservations are recommended.



Tumbler sponsor

# School district shares approach to spending funds

Last year, I had the opportunity to meet with many community members during listening sessions held across the Neenah Joint School District. While the conversations covered a wide range of topics, one question surfaced repeatedly and clearly: How does the district spend the dollars it receives?

That is a fair and important question. Public schools belong to the community, and transparency around school finance is not only an expectation; it is a responsibility. This column is intended to respond directly to that feedback and to provide a clear, accessible overview of how Neenah invests in its schools and how our spending compares to neighboring districts.

For the 2025–26 fiscal year, the Neenah Joint School District adopted an all-funds budget of approximately \$128 million. This total reflects the full cost of operating the district, including daily instruction, student support services, transportation, building operations and long-term financial commitments such as voter-approved referendum debt. Of



**Dr. Steve Harrison**

NJSD superintendent

that amount, approximately \$91.8 million supports the General Fund, which covers the district's core instructional and operational expenses.

While total budget figures are helpful, they do not tell the whole story. Larger districts naturally have larger budgets. To better understand how resources affect students directly, it is important to look at spending on a per-student basis.

In Neenah, per-student spending is approximately \$13,900, which is below the Wisconsin state median of roughly \$17,000 per student. District revenue per student (about \$15,400) is also below the state average. These figures show that Neenah operates with fewer dollars per student than many Wisconsin districts,

even as expectations for academic achievement, student support and school safety continue to increase.

So how are those dollars used? As in most school districts, the largest share of Neenah's budget (roughly 55 to 60 percent) is dedicated to instruction. This includes teacher salaries and benefits, classroom materials, curriculum development and instructional technology. Simply put, the majority of district resources are invested directly in teaching and learning.

Another significant portion supports student services, including counseling, special education, school psychology, health services, social workers, and academic interventions. These services are essential to ensuring students are supported socially, emotionally and academically, and that schools remain safe and inclusive environments.

The remaining portion of the budget covers essential operations, building maintenance and safety, transportation, food services and extracurricular activ-

ities. These functions allow schools to operate safely, effectively and provide students access to well-rounded educational experiences.

Community members also asked how Neenah compares to nearby districts. For context, the Appleton Area School District spends about \$14,700 per student, slightly more than Neenah, while the Oshkosh Area School District spends approximately \$18,700 per student, well above both Neenah and the state median. These differences are influenced by factors such as district size, enrollment trends, property tax base and past funding decisions and not by differences in commitment to students.

What this comparison highlights is the efficiency and dedication of Neenah's staff, who deliver strong educational outcomes with comparatively lean resources. It also reinforces the importance of continued, informed community conversations about school funding and long-term sustainability.

The district makes its budget documents, tax levy information and financial audits publicly available because transparency matters. When our community understands how resources are used, it strengthens trust and supports meaningful partnership between schools and the families and taxpayers we serve.

By sharing this information openly, my hope is to encourage continued dialogue, shared understanding and collective stewardship of our public schools. Transparency is an ongoing commitment, and one I am proud to uphold as superintendent of the Neenah Joint School District.

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# Neenah man charged in New Year's Eve stabbing case

Neenah News

A man remains on life support after being stabbed five times during a fight in a Neenah front yard on New Year's Eve.

Another man, Brady D. McIntosh, is facing one count of first-degree reckless injury and first-degree recklessly endangering safety as a result of the incident. Both charges have a repeater modifier attached to the charge that could lead to a longer prison sentence if he is convicted.

Court documents allege McIntosh arrived at a Neenah home early on Dec. 31 and got into a fight with the victim. McIntosh allegedly stabbed the man five times

during the fight in the home's front yard. As of Wednesday, the victim was reported to be in a medically induced coma and on life support.

McIntosh, 20, could be facing over 45 years of a bifurcated sentence including over 20 years in state prison and over 20 years of extended supervision if he is found guilty.

However, District Attorney Eric Sparr stated during McIntosh's initial court appearance that based on the victim's injuries charges in this case could be added or modified.

At the initial appearance hearing Jan. 8,

McIntosh's cash bond was set at \$500,000.

According to the criminal complaint, Neenah police responded to ThedaCare Regional Medical Center for a report of a stabbing in the early hours of Dec. 31. The victim was already being treated in the emergency room when police began their investigation.

McIntosh and his girlfriend were reported to be in Oshkosh when they received a call from the victim's girlfriend stating he was drunk and she needed to be picked up from the house in the 800 block of Sherry Street.

At one point, McIntosh and the victim allegedly got into a verbal argument on the phone and that led to the fight outside the Neenah home. McIntosh and his girlfriend left Oshkosh and went to Neenah, but first McIntosh grabbed his straight blade – a four-inch kitchen knife with a black handle.

McIntosh's girlfriend told police he always carries a knife. When the two arrived at the Neenah home McIntosh allegedly showed the victim the knife before the fight started.

The complaint alleges McIntosh stabbed the victim in the torso and then the victim tackled McIntosh and the fight continued on the ground. McIntosh's girlfriend had a video of the fight and showed it to officers.

The video allegedly shows McIntosh walking up the driveway holding the knife behind his back.

It goes on to show the victim and McIntosh exchange words, McIntosh throw a punch, they go to the ground and eventually the two separate.

One officer noted the victim "appeared intoxicated based on the slurred speech and his lack of awareness of his injuries." A witness told police that the victim did not know he was bleeding until he took his shirt off and saw the wounds.

The victim has had three major surgeries and a CT scan that showed damage to his small intestine and bowel. He was transferred to Froedtert for specialty care, which is when doctors informed police the victim had five stab wounds: one in the diaphragm, one in each lung and two in the liver.

## Goal met

FROM PAGE 1

tions is \$565,000, with about half covered through fundraising and the remainder budgeted in the city's Capital Improvement Plan.

Tom Sutter, a descendent of the Kimberly family who donated land and funds to construct the lighthouse in 1945, matched the first \$10,000 that the community raised for the project.

Although the fundraising goal has been met, donations will continue to be accepted through May 1 and those who donate by that date will be recognized on a donor board. Donors may designate their contribution to either a building fund, to support restoration and capital improvements, or to a perpetual care fund dedicated to long-term upkeep. The city also has Beacon Keeper apparel in limited sizes for purchase in the Neenah Parks & Recreation office at 211 Walnut St.

"The community's enthusiasm and support have truly been inspiring," said Parks & Recreation Director Michael Kading. "The stories of the impact Kimberly Point Park and the lighthouse have had on the community, families, and individuals are so encouraging."

Renovations include replacing the metal and asphalt roofing with new 30-year metal shingles, repainting the brick exterior and installing bird-protected louvers and new siding. Structural upgrades include new pre-finished aluminum-wrapped columns, fascia, soffit material and concrete footings.

The project will include modern upgrades to the public restrooms, along with painted wall murals.

Construction is expected to begin in late fall and be finished by spring of 2027. The city will hold a groundbreaking celebration on National Lighthouse Day, Aug. 7, which also marks the one-year anniversary of the launch of the project's fundraiser.



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# County considers joining environmental contamination lawsuit

Neenah News

The Winnebago County Board is considering potentially joining a lawsuit to recover costs related to cleaning up possible soil and groundwater contamination at Wittman Regional Airport.

The board heard a presentation during a special meeting Jan. 6 about retaining Dallas, Texas-based law firm Baron & Budd to represent it in multi-district litigation against some of the country's largest chemical manufacturers.

The concern is about the use of aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) to control and extinguish aviation fuel, said Mary Anne Mueller, the county's corporation counsel. Manufacturers such as 3M, Dupont, BASF and Tyco Fire Products have used AFFF in their products since the 1960s, she said.

"These companies knew or should have

known these toxic chemicals would contaminate the environment and resist natural degradation," Mueller said. "Soil was contaminated with firefighting retardant."

Other counties in Wisconsin including Brown and Eau Claire have recently decided to pursue litigation, Mueller said. With the board's approval, Winnebago County would join those efforts by retaining the same law firm representing those entities.

"Firefighters train with foam at airports and open training facilities, which is hosed off into adjacent soil," said attorney Jason Julius with Baron & Budd. "It migrated into the groundwater and into the soil causing ongoing longstanding contamination problems for entities that have used the foam historically."

The chemicals are the same that were used in every day products such as cook-

ware, waterproof apparel and fast food takeout containers. Those "forever chemicals" have found their way into soil and groundwater across the country, Julius said.

He said government entities have been forced to remove the contaminants at their own costs to avoid them being introduced to constituents.

If the county retains the law firm, the lawsuit would seek to recover any costs to remove, treat, remediate and dispose contamination from AFFF, Julius said. When passenger airplane service was offered at Wittman Airport, firefighters could have used products containing AFFF in training, so Julius said the goal would be to investigate for possible contamination from usage of the products.

"PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) is one of the most pressing envi-

ronmental issues for public entities given the impact these chemicals can have on drinking water, soil, storm water and waste water," Julius said. "All of those types of facilities can be impacted and are impacted by these chemicals. Right now, the only potential cost recovery action is against the manufacturers who produced these substances historically, sold them, delivered them and told entities like fire departments how to use them without acknowledging the uses that were identified could result in serious contamination of natural resources."

Julius said the county wouldn't be responsible for any costs or fees from the law firm unless recovery is successful in a potential legal case.

The board did not make a decision on whether to retain the law firm during the meeting.

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## Senior Smiles

FROM PAGE 1

tailgate event at Valley VNA Senior Care in Neenah, and a planned future "mocktail" meet-and-greet at Renaissance by Rennes in Appleton.

"It's just so rewarding to hear stories from seniors we meet, how they grew up and how their lives were," Ahlswede said.

During the recent get-together with those Highlands residents and Senior Smiles club members, three of those interviewees gathered to talk about how meaningful it's been to spend time with the students and share their life experiences.

"I love that I have younger people in my life to interact with," said 92-year-old Catriona Mackinnon, who came to the United States from Scotland in 1958. "I am

just so honored because I must have done something right. My message to young ones ... is to please be sure to make good choices in life."

Mackinnon pointed out that it was fitting that she grew up in The Highlands of Scotland and was now living at the Highlands in Neenah.

Also at the same gathering at the Highlands were brothers Werner Kuehn, 95, and his younger brother Hasso Kuehn, 94. Both brothers grew up in Germany not too far from the Poland border and were very young when WWII broke out. Eventually they and their mother moved to West Germany and eventually Werner and Hasso emigrated separately to the United States in the 1950s.

The Kuehn brothers both expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their stories with the Senior Smiles club members.

"The younger generation has a lot to learn from the experiences of the older generations," said Werner. To which Hasso replied, "And we've got a lot to learn from the younger generation, too."

At that same get-together, Highlands employee Debbie Griffith mentioned that she was organizing a bus trip for area seniors to take them to the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center to see the Bee Gees.

Nearly in unison, the Senior Smiles club members said, "What are The Bee Gees?" Once a couple chuckles faded away and Griffith informed them of who the Bee Gees were, it became clear that the Senior Smiles club members were living up to their mission: enriching the lives of younger and older generations and showing that all involved were doing something infinitely more valuable and meaningful than just Stayin' Alive.

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# Rockets stumble in home loss to Papermakers

By Steve Clark  
NEENAH NEWS

It wasn't the kind of start Neenah head coach Lee Rabas was looking for from his squad.

And that led to another tough finish for the Rockets as they dropped a 57-54 decision at home to Kimberly on Tuesday night, suffering their fourth loss in the last five games.

"We came out flat. The first six minutes of the game we were flat defensively and by the time we get going, it's too late. The other team is comfortable," Rabas said. "We don't get stops. We let the ball go where (the other team) wants it to. We're just not very good defensively."

Three of the four losses in that stretch have come by three points or less, while the combined record of the teams handing the Rockets the four losses is 35-10.

But that doesn't erase the sting of walking off the court in defeat, especially when the stumbling block can be identified.

"Our main thing is defense and we're out here trying to get stops and obviously we weren't good at it today," senior Nick Schultz said. "We come out soft. We come out letting guys catch it where they want to and not getting into them. It's just a lack of competitiveness."

It was just the third time this season Kimberly had been held to less than 60 points in a game, however, the Papermakers were able to shoot 55 percent from the floor and went 6-of-10 from 3-point range against the Rockets.

"When we do force misses, we give up offensive rebounds. Everybody shoots too well against us and we don't rebound," Rabas said. "Tonight was disappointing."



Neenah News

Neenah's Chase Nitz (5) scores at the rim over a pair of Kimberly defenders on Tuesday night.

If there is a bright side, it's that the Rockets are just halfway through the season – Neenah is now 7-5 overall with a guaranteed 13 games remaining – and there is time to get things corrected.

"It's definitely fixable," Schultz said. "But a big thing about it is our mentality. We build off routines and if guys aren't sticking to their routines and getting into

mentally, it's not going to get fixed."

The defense end of the game may have been an issue at the start of the game, but it was a seven-minute scoring drought in the second half that allowed the Papermakers to break the game open.

Schultz started the second half with a steal and lay-up to tie the game at 28 but Kimberly rattled off the next 13 points and

never trailed again.

"We have been struggling on offense this year and we go through spurts like that," Rabas said. "We're trying to work on it in practice and get more comfortable on that end. We'll keep working at it."

Neenah didn't let Kimberly just walk away with the win though.

A pair of baskets by Matthias Charles snapped the Kimberly run, while the Rockets put together a 5-0 burst on baskets by James Weiland and Trey White and a free throw from Jacob Jungwirth to pull within six points.

After two Kimberly free throws, Schultz – the lone Rocket to reach double figures with 11 points – knocked down a jumper followed by a basket from Kolton Fleege that narrowed the margin to 49-45 with less than three minutes to play.

The Rockets had a chance to pull even closer but failed to convert on the next possession and the Papermakers took advantage by scoring the next six points to push the lead back to 10.

Neenah scored seven points in the final 25 seconds but never threatened to regain the lead.

Fleege, Charles and Roan Koeper each finished with eight points for the Rockets, while Jungwirth added seven.

The Rockets return to the court on Friday at Appleton North and will play at home again next Tuesday against Stevens Point.

"We just don't have the consistency right now. It would be nice if we could put it together and be consistent," Rabas said. "We're not giving up. We'll keep working at it."

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# Continuing Neenah tradition fuels Benner's efforts



Neenah News

Senior Gideon Benner is one of the top swimmers for Neenah this season and also ran on the Rockets' state-qualifying cross country team.

By Steve Clark  
NEENAH NEWS

Gideon Benner swims lap after lap at the Neenah Middle School pool with one destination in mind.

As one of the leaders and most experienced swimmers for the Neenah High School squad, he takes pride in being part of the program's tradition and wants to make sure it splashes on.

That means making sure the Rocket red is hitting the water at the Waukesha South High School Natatorium in late February with another appearance at the state meet for the storied program.

"It's something I think about a lot, just how much I want to go to state and represent Neenah," Benner said after a practice earlier this week. "Everyone understands that's the goal. As a team or an individual, whatever it may be, let's just get to state."

Benner was an alternate for the relays that qualified for state last season, but did not swim in the meet. In fact, only one member of this year's squad felt the ripples of the water inside the Waukesha South Natatorium.

But even if the Rockets lost some individual firepower from last year's team that finished ninth overall in Division 1, that doesn't mean there isn't talent cranking out laps for Neenah this season.

"We have a lot of experience. We've gotten a taste of state and we're just hungry for more," Benner said. "We have a great group of guys and two incredible freshmen who I think could be the push across the finish line for us."

Benner likens this year's team to another group he participated in this fall.

Benner was on Neenah's boys cross country team that had to replace six of the seven runners that competed at the state meet in 2024. From the outside, it was a group that wasn't expected to make the trip to Wisconsin Rapids in 2025.

Within the team, though, it was a dif-

## Senior Standout



ferent thought process and it guided the Rockets to a sixth straight trip to the state meet and a top 10 finish.

"We were not supposed to get there and we weren't supposed to do as well as we did at the state meet," Benner said. "A lot of people doubted us and likewise here, a lot of people might doubt us. I can use my experience in cross country in swimming. We've got what it takes."

Benner anchors the distance freestyle events for the Rockets and had a strong sectional meet last season for the Rockets – placing sixth in the 200-yard freestyle and eighth in 500-yard freestyle.

He was about two seconds shy of qualifying in the 200-yard freestyle which he acknowledges is his best and favorite event.

"You have to be gutsy," Benner said of swimming the event, likening it to the 800 meters in track and field. "A lot of people take it out fast and just hope the back end (of the race) is there for them. It's something I do a lot. You never want to finish with too much left in the tank, so I just like to take it out fast and see where it gets me."

Although Benner is expected to swim both distance events – as well as join two of the Rockets relays – for sectionals, he spends time during the season away from his favored races.

Neenah has a process of jumbling the lineup throughout the season, giving the guys the chance to swim in different events.

"That's a huge part of our program. Any

SEE **Senior Standout** ON PAGE 12

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# Prep sports roundup

## BOYS HOCKEY

### Rockets blank rival St. Mary's Springs

Mark Sutton tallied a hat trick, Cartyr Simonson had a goal and four assists and Matthew Nelson pitched a shutout in net for Neenah/Hortonville/Menasha in a 6-0 win over rival St. Mary's Springs on Tuesday.

Three different players scored in the first period to stake the Rockets to the lead. Keegan Krueger, Sutton and Macsen Selch each tallied a goal in the opening period as the Rockets never trailed.

Simonson scored his goal in the second period, while Sutton had both tallies in the third period for the Rockets.

Sutton, Selch, Liam Kelley and Preston Liedke each had assists in the win.

Nelson made 12 saves in goal for the shutout.

The Rockets were coming off a 3-1 loss to University School on Saturday.

Neenah/Hortonville/Menasha got a Simonson power play goal in the first period to take the lead, but University tied the

score in the second and then tallied two goals in the third period – the last was an empty net goal.

Selch and Sutton assisted on Simonson's goal.

Nelson finished with 16 saves in goal.

### Reichenbacher leads Stars to victory

Elliott Reichenbacher finished with 15 saves to help the Fox Cities Stars to a 14-3 win over Oshkosh on Tuesday.

The senior netminder also stopped all 13 shots he faced to earn the shutout in a 6-0 win over Wisconsin Rapids on Saturday.

## GIRLS HOCKEY

### Drach nets goal in win for Fox Cities Stars

Neenah High School's Emmaree Drach scored the first goal of the game in the Fox Cities Stars' 2-1 win over Rochester Century/John Marshall (Minn.) on Saturday.

It was the first goal of the season for Drach, who has notched four assists on the year.

## GIRLS BASKETBALL

### Zephyrs stay unbeaten with rout of Cardinals

St. Mary Catholic, the top-ranked team in Division 4, improved to 13-0 on the season with a convincing 78-35 win over Newman Catholic on Monday.

Autumn Crowe finished with 21 points, 12 rebounds and six steals in the win for the Zephyrs, with Luci Nackers also tallying 21 points in the win. Gaby Guerrero also reached double figures with 10 points while Brecken Britzke chipped in seven.

The Zephyrs shot nearly 44 percent from the floor in the win and forced the Cardinals into 19 turnovers.

Last week, St. Mary Catholic put up a 79-41 win over Reedsville as Crowe and Nackers again led the way in the win. Crowe finished with 22 points and Nackers scored 20.

Bitsy McCauley and Lucy Norville each chipped in nine points for the Zephyrs.

### Neenah drops tussle with Kimberly

In a matchup of two of the top teams in the Fox Valley Association, Neenah fell on the road against Kimberly on Tuesday night, 69-51.

Rowan Klesmit led the Rockets with 16 points, while Sydney Michalkiewicz finished with 12 and Alissa Ebel added nine.

Neenah trailed 37-27 at the half.

The Rockets were coming off a 72-37 rout of Fond du Lac last Friday as Neenah bolted to a 36-11 halftime lead before coasting in the second half.

Klesmit hit five 3-pointers and finished with 27 points to lead the way for the Rockets, who had four players finish in double figures.

Ellie Buss scored 14 points with Ebel and Michalkiewicz each finishing with 11 points.

## BOYS BASKETBALL

### Rockets run roughshod over Fond du Lac

Five different players scored at least nine points in the game and Neenah dominated both halves against Fond du Lac in a 70-37 victory last Friday.

Xavier Bezars scored 13 points off the bench to lead the Rockets, who led 32-19 at halftime.

Roan Koepper also reached double fig-

ures and finished with 10 points and eight rebounds. Cal Juckem, Jackson Rindt and Jacob Jungwirth each finished with nine points.

### Rough second half stings Zephyrs in loss

St. Mary Catholic was outscored by 10 points in the second half as Iola-Scandinavia pulled away for a 72-57 victory over the Zephyrs on Tuesday night.

St. Mary Catholic had four players in double figures in the game led by Dylan Brenn with 14 points, followed by Alex Vosters with 12. Mason Wagner and Luke Fairweather finished with 11 and 10 points, respectively.

The Zephyrs finished with an advantage at the free-throw line – St. Mary Catholic was 20-of-27, while Iola-Scandinavia was just 10-of-14 – but made only one 3-pointer in the contest.

## BOYS WRESTLING

### Neenah rolls to dual meet win over Appleton East

The Rockets scored points in 13 of the 14 weight classes to claim a 78-3 win over Appleton East last Thursday.

Ten of the 13 victories came by pin with Kaden Roth notching the fastest stoppage needing just 35 seconds to earn a win at 190 pounds.

Also winning by pin for the Rockets was Chase Thomson (120), Garrett Nedens (126), Steven Czechanski (132), Jaxon Ennis (144), Declan Epley (159), Landen Sheppard (157), Declan Koch (165), Connor Simons (175) and Willy Brucks (285).

Carson Finch (103), Broden Butzke (113) and Cashtin Tiedt (138) won by forfeit.

## GIRLS WRESTLING

### Neenah takes third at Stevens Point duals

The Rockets finished 3-1 and toppled New Berlin West/Eisenhower, 45-24, to take third at the Stevens Point duals last Friday.

Four wrestlers went 4-0 on the day for the Rockets. Joelle Reay and Ava Armatti each won all of their matches by pin, while Kylee Kurszewski and Amari Richard each had three pins while going 4-0.


Greenlee Ennis and Janet Sorto each finished 3-1.

Neenah also scored dual wins over Kickapoo/LaFarge and Shiocton, while falling in the semifinals to Holmen.



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Worship Times: Saturday 6PM, Sunday 9am & Monday 6pm  
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