Be prepared with winter’s chilly arrival

The arrival of winter weather in Minnesota means it’s time to act and have our needs met. Some of us might remember sitting around the radio or TV on winter mornings listening for school to be canceled. Today’s weather information is relayed through numerous phone alerts and apps, helping everyone track changing weather conditions, apprise of storm threats and local snow emergencies. Have a plan to get timely information.

Sidewalk safety

Getting around after snowy weather can be challenging, especially for people with disabilities who don’t drive. The fear of falling and sustaining serious or fatal injuries because someone didn’t clear snow and ice from sidewalks, steps or curb ramps is all too real.

Most communities have a set time limit for when snow and ice must be removed from sidewalks and curb ramps, so check websites to see what the rules are in a particular community. The clock usually starts ticking when the snow or sleet stop falling, with a 24 to 48-hour time limit. Fines can be assessed to those who don’t clear paths in a timely manner and violators should be reported. Communities especially put this information on their websites.

People with disabilities can contact Disability Hub to ask about snow removal resources. Elders can check with the Senior Link Line. Be aware there may be costs associated with snow removal referrals.

In St. Paul, a group of volunteers called the Saintly City Snow Angels can help people with disabilities with three snow removal. This group is in need of volunteers. Contact the group through Facebook, at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1081305797824732.

Other cities may have block or neighborhood services groups that can provide snow removal help.

Salt, sand, clay cat litter or deicers should be kept on hand for home sidewalks, ramps and steps. Some cities give away sand but it must be picked up at a public works facility.

Energy assistance available

Rising energy bills on top of other soaring household costs are causing stress for many households. Minnesota’s Cold Weather Rule is a state law that protects residential utility customers from having electric or natural gas service shut off between October 1 and April 30. To protect service from disconnection, consumers must make up and keep a payment plan that the utility agrees to.

A payment plan can be set up at any time the Cold Weather Rule is in effect. Protection under the rule is available to homeowners and renters who pay their own heating utilities.

All natural gas and electric utilities must offer protection under the Cold Weather Rule. The rule doesn’t apply to delivered fuels; oil and propane or wood. But if a furnace that operates on delivered fuel and propane or wood is included.

Laura Baker's Minnesota school left a long-lasting legacy

Laura Baker's Minnesota School is one of the oldest disability service organizations in Minnesota. It was founded in 1897 by Laura Baker Millis and Laura Baker to address the needs of children with disabilities. The school was named in honor of the two women who worked tirelessly to create a safe and supportive environment for students with disabilities.

Laura Baker's Minnesota School has always been committed to providing high-quality education and support services to children and adults with disabilities. The school has a long-standing tradition of excellence in special education and has been at the forefront of disability rights and advocacy.

By 1915, Laura Baker's Minnesota School had grown into a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children and adults with disabilities. The school continued to evolve and expand its programs and services over the years, and it remains a leading provider of special education and support services in Minnesota.

Changes afoot at Minnesota Legislature, cabinet

The incoming Senate majority leader is Sen. Kari Dziedzic (DFL-Minneapolis). Sen. Bobby Joe Champion, another Minnesota DFLer, will be president of the Senate. Sen John Marty (DFL-Roseville) will be chair of finance, and Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope) will be tax chair.

Sen. Mark Johnson (R-East Grand Forks) will be minority leader. As Access Press reached the deadline for this issue, other committee leadership and any changes in committee structure hadn't been announced.

Work continues on legislative agendas. The Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD) hoped to wrap up its work soon.

The Minnesota Council on Disability hosts its 2023 legislative forum, noon to 2 p.m. Friday, December 16. The event will be virtual. Learn about the council’s legislative agenda, hear elected officials and their thoughts on disability policy, and learn from citizen advocates. Sign up through the state council web page, at https://www.disability.state.mn.us/. Rally days are also being planned, with many groups hoping to return to in-person or hybrid events.

Walz announced his cabinet November 15. Although most leaders are returning, Walz's decision to retire will be deeply felt. She guided the state through the

Laura Baker Millis and Laura Baker

Laura Baker's Minnesota school left a long-lasting legacy

Much has changed since 1897, when the words “retarded” and “backward” were used to describe children with disabilities. The Laura Baker Services Association (LBSSA), one of Minnesota’s oldest disability service organizations, is celebrating its 125th year at its annual gala is December 3.

The association has grown into a diverse nonprofit, helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities lead meaningful and productive lives. It has continued its commitment to education while offering many other services to children and adults with disabilities in the Northfield area. That includes education, accommodations and support services.

LEGACY To page 3

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Neurodiverse accommodations at events let everyone share the fun

A magical season is upon us, with great events available to choose from. Plays and stage presentations at this time of year often have a theme centered on one or more of the December holidays. Many of us might fondly remember going to see a special play or musical in earlier years, often with our families or as part of a school field trip group. Some might recall our childhood experiences and relatives’ memories of the stage production of The Worst Christmas Pageant Ever. Countless events, markets, lights displays, Christmas parades, Advent happenings, the solstice, Santa houses, cookie exchanges, New Year’s Eve parties, winter nature walks...there is so much to choose from. Maybe you want to learn about Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights. Or are you curious about the British and Canadian tradition of Boxing Day? This is also a great time of year to share new traditions and cultures.

For some of us, the December holidays are less about fun with family and friends, and more about seeking accommodations. One in 36 adults in Minnesota is on the autism spectrum. Many of us live with triggers that can be overwhelming, such as loud noises or flashing lights.

We may get inundated at the holiday events our families and friends enjoy. We may really dislike changes in a routine, having a tree placed where a chair was or having a group come to visit. Or we may fret on an aspect of the holidays.

Autism is a lifelong neurological disorder that affects many Minnesotans. That’s a significant number of people on the autism spectrum. This includes many theater companies with quiet resources in general took a toll. Many of our favorite events are no more, or are returning in a scaled-back form since the COVID-19 pandemic.

But this kind of accommodation is not just for larger events. It’s also for smaller events, like the local art fair, the neighborhood street party, the community holiday fair, or the local theater performance. And it’s not just for those with autism. It’s for all of us, including those with other neurodivergent needs.

L.C. in court case is remembered as more than a set of initials

L.C. was Lois Curtis, who died this fall of pancreatic cancer. She was 55 and lived outside of Atlanta. Curtis and Elza Wilson, the court case lead plaintiffs, both lived with mental illness and developmental disabilities. They were voluntarily admitted to a psychiatric unit of Georgia Regional Hospital. Following treatment, mental health professionals stated that each woman was ready to move to a community-based program. But the women remained institutionalized, finally filing suit under the ADA. The case went all the way to the nation’s highest court. Judges made two key points in the 1999 ruling. One was that institutionalization of people who could be living in their own communities without unwarranted assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable of or unworthy of participating in community life. A second point was that institutionalization “severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment.”

Court Public Radio was among the many news outlets reporting on Curtis’ death, drawing on an interview with her attorney, Sue Jamieson. Jamison met Curtis during a state hospital tour. Jamison recalled that Curtis asked, “Get me out of here. Would you please get me out of here? When am I going to get out of here?” Curtis kept calling Jamison after that visit, asking when she could get out. That led to the lawsuit and landmark court decision.

The court decision was a major change for people with disabilities and elders, shifting thinking away from institutional care and towards community-based accommodations. It’s not only the right thing to do, it’s the equitable thing to do.

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We often hear about the Olmstead Act and Minnesota’s ongoing work on its Olmstead Plan, to work toward integration of people with disabilities in their communities. The legal right is well-documented. In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court in Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W. that unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The court decided that public entities must provide community-based services to individuals with disabilities when such services are appropriate; when the affected persons do not need or want an institutionalization, and when community-based services can be reasonably accommodated, taking into account the resources available to the public entity and the needs of others who are also receiving disability services.

Olmstead, of course, was a key case. But many Olmstead, then human resources...
Our year-end NewsMatch campaign needs your help!

Frankly, to me it doesn’t matter what you decide to give. Whatever story bricks in all we find a way to do.

We are excited to be brand new participants in NewsMatch. NewsMatch is a collaborative fundraising effort to support independent, nonpartisan journalism like ours. Since 2016, the campaign has helped raise over $223 million to support independent media outlets that produce fact-based, nonprofit news and information.

In December, NewsMatch will match your new monthly donation 12 times or double your one-time gift, all up to $1,000. That means that through NewsMatch, we can raise an additional $15,000!

For a small, independent, nonprofit organization like Access Press, this is a big deal and will help us deliver the kind of disability community-focused journalism you’ve come to expect. It’s the kind of reporting that can make a real difference in our community.

Typically, people think about making charitable gifts, news sources don’t top the list. This is why public radio and TV have weeklong pledge drives. We at Access Press also have to remind our readers that we depend on your support. While we do offer advertising, it does not cover all of our costs. This year we are asking you to join the ranks of our donors at $10 or $1,000. If you are feeling around and give to your favorite Minnesota disability newspaper. In full disclosure we are the only one in Minnesota. You will make double the impact.

What do you say? Will you help to sustain your trusted source of disability-related, pay-for-news?

Community funded, community driven: that’s the nonprofit news difference. Make a donation today.
Can a kid inherit an umpire gene? My dad officiated football, baseball and basketball for the NCAA for more than 40 years. As the son of the chief umpire for the College World Series in Omaha during the 1950s and 1960s, I got to sit in the dugouts with some amazing (eventually MLB) baseball players; and watch my dad get booted into the stands by thousands of fans. We moved back to Minnesota where he promptly organized the Minnesota Umpires Association. Here, he mentored me so I could be an umpire in college. Over the years I had already learned the number one job of an umpire: to protect the integrity of the game. That principled leadership lesson would eventually influence my professional careers in business ethics and psychotherapy.

Our two daughters, Marinda and Alisia, and I spent many years as soccer referees and referree mentors, a passion I continue to pursue. Until now, until signed by paraplegia nearly six years ago. Because refereeing a soccer game in a wheelchair seemed clearly impractical, umpiring softball made good sense to me even in my mid-70s. For several years my applications to umpire were ignored or rejected. I kept reminding myself that no one can protect someone without someone, so I turned to my very dear friend Terry Larkin, himself a physically challenged nearly 80-year-old umpire, who connected me to Jim Lombardi, the St. Louis Park Rec Supervisor. Thankfully, Jim and Terry had the vision and courage to imagine an umpire successfully working a game in a wheelchair. What a concept.

Once the players could see that I knew what I was doing out there, they didn’t see the wheelchair. There are few things as fulfilling as being on the field of play on a warm summer evening under the lights, with men and women enjoying each other and the game, as they struggle mightily to hit or catch a ball just for the love of it. If you are physically challenged and yet can clearly imagine yourself officiating or mentoring any kind of athletic activity, I encourage you to find someone involved in that sport - a coach, player, manager, or official, and share your vision with them. Your experience and personality are totally unique. Any game you choose to officiate will be better because you became part of the action. It’s critically important for young people to witness disabled men and women officiating and mentoring in every sport.

In 2002 the National Federation of State High School Associations instituted a rule change that now permits umpires and coaches to use wheelchairs, crutches and other mobility aids. The Wounded Warrior Umpire Academy trains veterans that have worked at the highest level of professional baseball. We are living in a rare time when rules and traditions are evolving rapidly. This may be your time to wheel onto the field and change your life like it has mine. I’m reminded of an old proverb my dad once shared with me: They say old umpires never die . . . they just round the bases, and quietly steal home.

Michael Labrosse lives in St. Louis Park. He also refereed soccer for 18 years. His resume includes work as director at InnerCare Behavioral Clinic, studies in ethics and leadership development at Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and proctor in Psychology/Communications at University of Minnesota Twin Cities. This article also appeared in the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association newsletter.

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**WINTER**

Fuels run by electricity, Cold Weather Rule help can be sought through the local electric company.

- Natural gas, electric, municipal utility or electric cooperative for more information, or contact the Commission’s Consumer Affairs Office at consumer.

Households that meet income guidelines can also seek help through the Minnesota Energy Assistance Program. The program pays toward heat, electricity, and past due water costs. Energy Assistance is free for all eligible households. Applications for the program year 2022-2023 are available, through community partners around Minnesota.

The state website explains the application process. Visit [https://mn.gov/energy/energy-assistance](https://mn.gov/energy/energy-assistance)

For helping in finding the local energy assistance please contact the local provider. The county program is open to renters and homeowners.

The program also has the capacity to control COVID-19. Republican lawmakers tried to block her confirmation. She has served in other public health and disability service capacities, including serving as CEO of Center for Co-Create, now Courage Kenny. She has also been vice president of public affairs and philanthropy at Allina Health and served as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota at the School of Public Health.

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**TRELLIS MANAGEMENT MAY BE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS**

for our accessible waiting lists at the following affordable communities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Name</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Bedrooms (if applicable)</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Albritt Townhomes</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 BR</td>
<td>612-824-4893</td>
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<td>Cornerstone Creek Apartments</td>
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<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-721-2252</td>
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<td>Elliot Park Apartments</td>
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<td>Hanover Townhomes</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-721-2252</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hopkins Village Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-377-5877</td>
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<td>Village Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<td>612-724-3029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln Place Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-724-3029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olsen Townhomes</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-777-9915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Plaza Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prairie Meadows</td>
<td>Eden Prairie</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-794-5544</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Ridge Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slatter Square Apartments</td>
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<td>612-349-1014</td>
</tr>
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<td>Spirit on Lake</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<td>612-742-3029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunny Meadows</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<td>612-777-3650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiny Place</td>
<td>Brooklyn Center</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-742-3029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vicksburg Highlands</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vairation Place</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-647-2500</td>
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<td>Willow Apartments</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
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<td>612-647-2500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woodland Court Apartments</td>
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<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-383-0312</td>
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</table>

**HOUSING FOR VETERANS AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Name</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Bedrooms (if applicable)</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-209-1712</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veteran’s &amp; Community Housing</td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 BR</td>
<td>612-333-0227</td>
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</table>

For more information, please call the Minnesota Housing Finance Authority at 1-866-407-8352 or visit [https://mn.gov/mhfa](https://mn.gov/mhfa).

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**ACCESS PRESS**

December 2022 Volume 33, Number 12 Pg 4
Deafblind poet Clark releases new book, How to Communicate

John Lee Clark

Deafblind poet John Lee Clark’s new poetry book, How to Communicate, will be released in December. It has already received praise.

“How to Communicate brims with the talent and generosity of a living classic. And what a talent! Take, for instance, Slates, a form John Lee Clark has created based on Braille: it is both imitable and available to anyone. Or take his brilliant prose poems that are completely unlike any other prose poems I have read. There is simply no one else like John Lee Clark and I envy the reader who discovers the first time.” — Ilya Kaminsky, author of Deaf Republic

“The poems in John Lee Clark’s revolutionary How to Communicate work together as a manifesto that lays bare the ways in which a society that assumes seeing and hearing as the norm views touch as suspicious, enough so to try to outlaw touch. And yet, if manifests, even invitation: what might it mean to write toward in a different direction and from a different spatial perspective,’ Clark asks, and goes on to show us, in poems of formal virtuosity, of fierce tenderness, of triumphant community... How to Communicate is the steadily revelatory gift I didn’t know I’d been waiting for.” — Carl Phillips, author of Then the War Art

Clark was a featured writer at the Deaf Lit Extravaganza (Handtype Press, December 2022) and led a very active Special Education Student Finance Bootcamp, a workshop series attended by special education leaders, school finance directors and superintendents. She served as a peer educator for the Minnesota Department of Education, Division of Compliance and Accountability, and as a member of the Minnesota State Autism Network. In 2001 through her work with the Minnesota State Autism Network, Ouillette helped draft new autism spectrum disorder (ASD) criteria and the ASD Promising Practices Manual. She served on the Minnesota Autism Task Force (2013-2014) and was active in the Dakota County Collaborative. Ouillette has served in several MASE leadership capacities, including chairing professional development and strategic planning committees and serving on the membership oversight group. She served on both the MASE and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) boards, serving as MASA metro special education department representative. Ouillette was also a member of the Minnesota Executive Development Committee as a joint MASA-MASE member. MASE is a professional association organized to promote programs and services to improve the education of children with disabilities, to foster high quality programs of professional development, and to study problems relating to serving children with disabilities and improving the leadership of administrators for special education.

Lakeville schools’ Ouillette is honored for long special education career

Renée Ouillette

A longtime special education leader has been honored by the Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE). Renée Ouillette, who recently retired as executive director of student services for Lakeville Area Public Schools, is the recipient of the 2022 MASE Legacy Award. Ouillette was honored for her commitment to empowering and developing and mentoring leaders who reflect the MASE mission.

She began her career as special education coordinator in the Stillwater and Northern Wright Special Education Cooperative. In 1997, she moved to Lakeville, where she served as a special education coordinator, director of special services, and then finally as the Executive Director of Student Services. Ouillette retired in August.

“Renée is set apart by her ability to be a leader of leaders,” said Todd Travis, director of special education of the Midwest Special Education Cooperative.

“She has a rare combination of immense technical skill in areas such as due process and finance while also possessing amazing interpersonal skills necessary to articulate complex ideas in a way that engages and motivates others.”

Lakeville was one of the first districts to co-locate mental health services for students, including having a therapist in the classroom for those who needed support. In addition, Ouillette also supported the Best Buddies program, an after-school club for inclusion, bringing together middle and high school special education students with general education students. Ouillette developed and led a very active Special Education Advisory Council, which has established an annual celebration of Inclusive Schools Week.

Ouillette has worked with colleagues statewide, including the Special Education Finance Bootcamp, a workshop series attended by special education leaders, school finance directors and superintendents. She served as a peer educator for the Minnesota Department of Education, Division of Compliance and Accountability, and as a member of the Minnesota State Autism Network. In 2001 through her work with the Minnesota State Autism Board, VSA Minnesota, the Laurent Clerc National Center, Intermedia Arts Center and The Loft Literary Center.

She was a finalist for the 2016 Split This Rock Freedom Flow Award for Poetry and Activism. His work is included in the anthologies Beauty Is A Verb: The New Poetry of Disability, Deaf American Prose, St. Paul Almanac, and The Nodin Anthology of Poetry.

Clark lives in St. Paul with his wife, the artist Adrean Clark, their three boys and two cats. He works for the Minnesota Department of Economic Development as a Braille and Protactile instructor.

Links to his latest book are at Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/dp/132403534X

Barnes & Noble: https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/how-to-communicate-john-lee-clark/1140914172

Bookshop: https://bookshop.org/books/how-to-communicate/9781324035343

Indiebound: https://www.indiebound.org/9781324035343
A highlight of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Minnesota Conference this fall was the presentation of awards, honoring those who have made a positive difference in the lives of people living with mental illness.

Jeff Zuckerman is a winner of the Volunteer Award, in recognition of an individual who has generously given time and expertise and has shown exceptional leadership as a volunteer with NAMI Minnesota.

"Jeff has been a family support group leader for spouses and partners for over five years. During this time, he has helped countless people find support and know that they are not alone," said Mariah C. Owens, NAMI Minnesota Board president.

"We understand the power that one individual has to create change. Every day, NAMI is inspired by the people who have championed justice, dignity, and respect for children and adults affected by mental illnesses."

Zuckerman published a book called Unglued: A Bipolar Love Story. The book is about his marriage to Linda and how he was affected by the late onset of her bipolar disorder. It was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Awards and has won other kudos. Zuckerman has held readings for NAMI groups across the country and donates a portion of the sales to NAMI Minnesota.

Marcus Linn was also presented with a Volunteer Award. Linn ran the LGBTQA NAMI Connection group for more than 10 years, recently stepping down as a volunteer. He provided a safe place for LGBTQA community members who live with mental illness. Linn said, "I strongly believe in voluntarism and especially have aimed my efforts toward the queer community because that is who I am, what I know, whom I love, and need to see strong and healthy."

"People living with mental illnesses experience discrimination, and some may refuse to seek professional help to avoid the discrimination they may face. Now, consider what it is like to face a mental illness as part of an additionally discriminated group; in this case, as an LGBTQA person," said Sus. Adelholth, NAMI Minnesota executive director. "LGBTQA+ people confront discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity while also dealing with the societal bias against mental illnesses. Marcus wants to make sure that no one walks this path alone."

Dave Lee, director of Carlton County Public Health and Human Services for Minnesotans who make a difference in mental health efforts saluted Jan Ormasa, Ryan Alexander and Dean Swenson from Hosanna Church.
Hulden wins inaugural Goldberg award

A highlight of PACER’s annual gala in November was the announcement of the first-ever Paula A. Goldberg Champion for Children with Disabilities Award. The honoree is Maren Hulden of Minneapolis.

Hulden is a supervising attorney at the Minnesota Disability Law Center, where she previously worked an advocate for the Legal Services Advocacy Project. She is also the parent of a young son with a disability.

Hulden is respected and well-known among disability community members through her work with the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, and her efforts on various bills at the Minnesota Legislature.

She helps legislators and community members understand problems from both a systemic and human level, and has a deep understanding of the barriers to inclusion faced by children with disabilities and their families. She has been instrumental in helping pass legislation, including recovery education, inclusive childcare and more.

Julia Page, who nominated Hulden for this award, said “She is one of the most effective advocates I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Maren is articulate in her advocacy both in content knowledge and relationship building. Maren possesses a perfect combination of warmth, empathy, story-telling, and deep knowledge of data and policy. I truly think that she could work with anyone and get any goal accomplished. In addition to her vast knowledge as an attorney, her experience as an educator and mother of a young child with a disability give her a deep understanding of the barriers to inclusion that children with disabilities and their families face. Maren is constantly working to promote and protect the human rights of people who have disabilities, and she is deeply deserving of this award.”

Goldberg, a co-founder of PACER, died in May. She is remembered for her strong advocacy and passion for helping children with disabilities.

MOHR celebrates employers

MOHR, the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation, has announced its winners of the 2022 Outstanding Disability Employers Awards. MOHR honored employers that provide exceptional work opportunities as well as supportive and inclusive policies and practices.

Award winners go above and beyond to provide quality work opportunities for employees with disabilities. Awards are given in a number of categories.

Nominations come from a wide range of Minnesota disability service providers.

The Greater Minnesota Large Employers winners are Walmart, Duluth, nominated by Peace of Mind of Duluth, Inc.; Tahey, Inc. Professional Food Service Management, Fairmont, nominated by Step Inc. and Duluth Public Schools, ISD-709 Duluth, nominated by CHOICE, unlimited Twin Cities Metro Area Large Employers winner is Lunds & Byerlys Highland Park, nominated by Partnership Resources, Inc.

Greater Minnesota Midsize Employers winners are Shattuck-St. Mary’s School, Faribault, nominated by KCQ, Inc.; Cash Wise Food, Willmar, nominated by West Central Industries, Market House Meats, nominated by Epic Enterprise, Inc.; Lyon County Environmental Services, Marshall, nominated by Advance and Super One Foods, Two Harbors, nominated by Lake County DFC, Inc.

Twin Cities Metro Area Midsize Employers award winners are Driskill’s Downtown Market Hopkins, nominated by Opportunity Partners; Cub Northtown (Blaine) nominated by Opportunity Partners, New Perspective Highland Park, St. Paul, nominated by TSE, Inc. and Hy-Vee Spring Lake Park, nominated by Rse, Incorporated.

Greater Minnesota Small Employers Award winners are Pizza Ranch Laverne, nominated by Rock County Opportunities, Inc. (RCO); GLS Promotions LLC; Brainerd, nominated by Productive Alternatives Inc.; Winsted Elementary School, Winsted, nominated by Adult Training Habilitation Center; EasyLving, LLC, Duluth, nominated by Udac, and Grandma’s Marathon, Duluth, nominated by CHOICE, unlimited.

Twin Cities Area Small Employers awards were given to Buffalo Country Store, Buffalo, nominated by Functional Industries, and Culver’s Eagan, nominated by ProAct, Inc.

Outstanding Disability Employers Awards. MOHR honored employers that provide exceptional work opportunities as well as supportive and inclusive policies and practices.

Award winners go above and beyond to provide quality work opportunities for employees with disabilities. Awards are given in a number of categories.

Nominations come from a wide range of Minnesota disability service providers.

The Greater Minnesota Large Employers winners are Walmart, Duluth, nominated by Peace of Mind of Duluth, Inc.; Tahey, Inc. Professional Food Service Management, Fairmont, nominated by Step Inc. and Duluth Public Schools, ISD-709 Duluth, nominated by CHOICE, unlimited Twin Cities Metro Area Large Employers winner is Lunds & Byerlys Highland Park, nominated by Partnership Resources, Inc.

Greater Minnesota Midsize Employers winners are Shattuck-St. Mary’s School, Faribault, nominated by KCQ, Inc.; Cash Wise Food, Willmar, nominated by West Central Industries, Market House Meats, nominated by Epic Enterprise, Inc.; Lyon County Environmental Services, Marshall, nominated by Advance and Super One Foods, Two Harbors, nominated by Lake County DFC, Inc.

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Bridges MN is takeover focus

A large and troubled provider of services to Minnesota adults with disabilities has agreed to be acquired nearly five months after state regulators revoked its license for numerous health and safety violations.

Bridges MN, which has about 400 clients and more than 50 home groups statewide, has struck a deal to be taken over by Fort Worth, Texas-based Caregiver Inc., which provides residential and in-home support to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in five states, according to a letter sent to clients last week. The transaction is expected to close by January 20, the provider said.

The deal, if approved, would save Bridges MN from being shut down or taken over by state regulators — an outcome that could have upended care for hundreds of people who rely on the St. Paul-based provider for supportive housing, employment and other services. These clients have been in limbo since late June, when the state Department of Human Services (DHS) took the unusual step of revoking Bridges MN’s license because of “serious and repeated” violations and findings of maltreatment involving vulnerable adults.

In interviews, some people who rely on Bridges MN for services said they have been anxious about losing their services since the state’s overseer is daunting at a time when care providers across the state are struggling with staff shortages and thousands of caregiving jobs are going unfilled. Some social workers and families report waits of a year or longer for spots in group homes or day activity centers that support people with disabilities.

“This [acquisition] avoided a nightmare scenario,” said Barnett Rosenfeld, state ombudsman for mental health and developmental disabilities. “Under that scenario, everybody would have been scrambling for dozens, if not hundreds, of clients getting put into nursing facilities, group homes or other institutional settings that lack the capacity to serve them well.”

In written statements, Bridges MN has said the state’s allegations of failure to report and maltreatment violations were “wrong and exasperating” and contained factual mistakes. In July, Bridges MN appealed the state’s license revocation order, which set in motion a regulatory process for determining whether the provider would be allowed to continue operating.

Bridges MN issued a statement from its co-founder and president of disability services, Blake Elliot, that read in part, “As we’ve gotten to know [Caregiver], it’s clear they share our person-centered approach to those we serve. By joining our two organizations, we gain the experience and resources of a large, experienced partner committed to our growth and improvement goals.”

The proposed deal follows a history of regulatory problems at Bridges MN, which has been sanctioned more than 50 times the past two years. Those include reports of unsanitary conditions, failure to provide basic care, failure to complete background checks on new hires and failure to report maltreatment, records show. (Source: Star Tribune)

Managed care contracts are set

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has finalized managed care contracts for families and children in 80 Greater Minnesota counties and for older adults and adults with disabilities statewide. The new contracts for public health care programs will serve approximately 600,000 Minnesotans, beginning January 1, 2023.

The following managed care plans will have contracts in the seven metro-area counties: Blue Plus, HealthPartners, HealthPartners Primary Care, Medica, PrimeWest Health, South Country Health Alliance, UCare and UCare’s Minnesota Care Plan, a Medicaid Care Program.

The contracts for older adults and adults with disabilities will take effect statewide for the Minnesota Senior Health Options, Minnesota Care Plus and Special Needs BasicCare programs. (Source: Minnesota DHS)

Inmates awaiting transfers are eyed

Inmates committed to the custody of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) have spent weeks and even months waiting in jail to be transferred to a state hospital, according to a recent KTSP-TV 5 INVESTIGATES report based on court records.

DHS confirms 64 people are currently waiting behind bars despite orders to move them into treatment. Now, former Rep. Debra Hilstrom (IDFL-Brooklyn Center), the chief author of the 48-hour law, is among those asking why.

“Clearly, there’s a bed shortage because otherwise they wouldn’t be sitting there,” Hilstrom said. “Why are they not enough beds? What are you doing to ensure that there are enough beds in the future?”

In response to recent criticism from judges, DHS officials cited increasing referrals, staffing shortages and the impacts of COVID-19 as reasons for the agency’s inability to comply with the law.

Dr. KyleeAnn Stevens, executive medical director for behavioral health at DHS, reiterated some of those points in a statement to 5 INVESTIGATES Monday.

“From its inception, the 48-hour law has presented tremendous challenges for DHS-operated psychiatric facilities. Priority admissions have more than tripled since the first full year of the law’s implementation, and we expect the number of referrals to continue rising,” Stevens said. “Our ongoing difficulty under the 48-hour law has been compounded by chronic staffing shortages that have hampered the entire healthcare sector for more than two years.”

In response to recent lawsuits, DHS lawyers and even some mental health advocates have called the 48-hour law “unrealistic” and “unfair.”

Nine years after her legislation passed with bipartisan support, Hilstrom makes no apologies.

“Just because it’s hard to do doesn’t mean it isn’t the right thing to do,” Hilstrom said. “I just say ‘we can’t do it’ and then not propose anything in the alternative doesn’t take care of the problem. It’s a problem and it’s still going to be a problem tomorrow until people say this is how you solve it.”

(Source: KSTP-TV)

Accommodations added by police

The three police departments in the Twin Cities metro area have added various disability accommodations this fall.

The St. James Police Department will be better prepared for serving the public after receiving a $155,000 federal grant that will allow the agency to purchase a training simulator. It will be the sole Greater Minnesota simulator available. After training its nationwide team of 20, St. James will then offer training sessions to police officers and law enforcement agencies throughout Minnesota and northern Iowa.

Only 45 law enforcement agencies in the country were awarded grants by the Department of Justice under the grant application.

The grant comes from the U.S. Department of Justice and is earmarked to purchase a simulator to enhance police training, autism awareness, mental health awareness, and effectively communicating with the public, among other training topics. The simulator provides realistic and immersive training scenarios for police officers, Anderson said.

The training simulator has an extensive library, including training on use of force, autism awareness, mental health awareness and decision making. “All of the skills that officers need to be successful with their jobs are contained within the scenarios in the simulator,” Anderson said.

It’s expected that the simulator will be installed by the end of the year and will be housed in the St. James Police Department’s training room. Officers will undergo monthly training exercises.

The $155,000-DHS grant provided this fall ordered 100 autism awareness decals. Bearing the puzzle piece symbol for autism, the decals can be placed in the window of one’s home or vehicle to alert emergency responders that an occupant may be on the autism spectrum or special needs and may not respond well to verbal commands.

“It’s another tool that alerts us to that fact and provides us with more information so we can utilize some communication training that we have to help people that live with autism and other disabilities to remain calm and not get traumatizing to anyone we come into contact with,” said Le Sueur Police Chief Aaron Thieke.

(Source: Free Press of Mankato, Le Sueur County News)
Dakota United, Burnsville/Farmington/Lakeville win soccer crowns

It was deja vu all over again at the 2022 Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) Class AA State Soccer Tournament.

Adapted soccer tournaments. Teams that appeared in the 2021 CI and CI divisions’ finals were back for repeat matches.

CI division teams are for pre-pro athletes with cognitive disabilities. CI division teams play with the same rules as the CI division, with one goal in each half.

Decision-making teams and overwhelming success.

The tournament was held November 18-19 at Stillwater Area High School

In the CI division, Dakota United reversed in 2021 fortunes with a 4-3 come-from-behind win over Robbinsdale/Hopkins/Mound Westonka. The Robins won 5-1 in 2021.

Seventh-grade forward Anthony Docketer Jr. scored at 10:23 in the second half to put the Robins up 3-1. Dakota United senior forward Fiona Sitzmann took over from there, netting two goals to secure the victory for the Hawks. Sitzmann scored all four of the Hawks’ goals.

Senior forward Jose Leon Estrada scored two goals for Robbinsdale/Hopkins/Mound Westonka.


The Minneapolis South Tigers earned their place in the tourney, defeating the Rochester Raiders 9-1.

Junior forward Nick Staloch and senior midfielder Jamal Taylor accounted for three goals, with offensive four goals apiece. Sophomore midfielder Alon Gasher added two assists.

Senior Calvin Rowland featured two goals and an assist for the Mustangs.

Senior forward Dontae Willis and junior defender Stephanie Buse scored two goals apiece for St. Paul Humboldt. Willis also had one assist.

Park Center was also in the seven-team tournament.

The tournament team members are: Nick Rentie, Anoka-Hennepin; Willis, St. Paul Humboldt; Staloch and Alty Tyler, Minneapolis South; Joe Hansen and Andrew Weston, Rochester; Estrada, Duras Larson and Calvin Bauman, Robbinsdale/Hopkins/Mound Westonka; and Sitzmann, Rohan.

Dedipan and Reece Martin, Dakota United.

The Blazing Cats of Burnsville/Farmington/Lakeville triumphed, 7-4.

The team found themselves in a match of the 2021 CI title game. And once again the Blazing Cats triumphed, 7-4.

The score was 4-2 with five minutes remaining in the first half, but junior forward Caden Roeseth struck with 1:20 left in the half to give the Blazing Cats a 5-2 edge at the break.

The teams traded goals in the second half, with the Blazing Cats four-hitter junior Mark Manwarren pulling the Hawks within 6-3 with 4:18 remaining. The score stayed stuck at the 5-2 mark until the game’s final whistle.

The Blazing Cats’ lead to 7-3. The Hawks managed one more goal, but it wasn’t enough to overcome Burnsville/Farmington’s advantage.

The Robins scored in Dakota United: ninth-grade forward Myles Johnson, sophomore forward Ada Kramar, senior forward Joseph Orton, and senior defender Thomas Christophersen.

This was the third overall championship for Dakota United.

Sophomore forward Chase McCann netted the team’s lone goal for the Mustangs.

Junior defender Maria McKnight and junior forward Dalton Huberty accounted for St. Cloud’s two goals.

St. Paul Johnson defeated Park Center 9-8, behind four goals from senior Jesus Gutierrez. Senior Mason Quinlan added three goals for the Governors and junior James Brown tallied two goals and one assist.

The Robins-Saints-Park Center Division won four goals and junior forward Emilio Hernandez had three assists.

The Robins-Chan Park Center/Prior Lake/Shakopee/Shakopee were also in the eight-team tournament.

The tournament team members are: Sanders, Park Center; Gunter, St. Paul Johnson; Hanson, Park Center; Clark, Stillwater/Mahometon; Kyle Jacobson, Hopkins/Rochester; Sorenson, Park Center; Wellington, Anoka-Hennepin; Rose, St. Cloud Area; Thomas Pittman and Mora-Clark, Stillwater/Mahometon; Kyle Jacobson, Hopkins; Streater, Park Center; Abderholden, Anoka-Hennepin; Andros, Robbinsdale/Hopkins/Mound Westonka; Roysen, Angel Figueroa and Aaron Blood, Burnsville/Farmington/Lakeville.

The Robins scored for Robbinsdale/Hopkins/Mound Westonka.

A Robins waiter flies across the gym.

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For more news, go to the Facebook site Minnesota Radio Talking Books.

Audio information about the daily book listings is on the National Federation for the Blind (NFBl) Newsline and National Federation for NFBl by calling 651-539-1424. The NFB-NLINES service provides access to more than 500 magazines and newspapers. To learn more, visit www.nfb.org/vision-impairment

Donate to the State Services for the Blind at mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate

The sampling publications of Access Press do not represent the full array of programming. More programs and books are available.

Chautauqua* Monday - Friday 6 a.m.

Choice Reading* Monday - Friday 2 p.m.
Other People Manage, fiction by Ellen Hawley. 2022. A quietly devastating novel, set in late 20th Century Minneapolis, about our failings and how we cope. Read by Diane Dahrh. Six broadcasts; begins Thu, Dec. 1. Tell Me How to Be, fiction by Neel Patel. 2022. A compulsively readable, funny, hard-hitting novel about family, American identity, and the secrets we keep from the ones we love most. Read by Pat Muir. 12 broadcasts; begins Mon, Dec. 5.


Afternoon Report* Monday - Friday 4 p.m.

Night Journey* Monday - Thursday 7 p.m.
The Woman in the Blue Cloak (rebroadcast), fiction by Dean Mayer. 2019. Set in South Africa, police captain Benny Griessel must unravel a horrific murder and the theft of a rare painting. Read by Andrea Bell. Four broadcasts; begins Mon, Dec. 5. – V

Blood Up North, fiction by Fredrick Soukup. 2022. Cass and Jack’s sibling loyalty was forged in the crucible of their tragic upbringing in the Northwoods town of Backus, Minnesota. Now an unsavory scheme endangers both of their lives. Read by Jeffrey Wehle. Seven broadcasts; begins Mon, Dec. 5. – L

The Ursla, fiction by Brian Freeman. 2022. Deputy Rebecca Colder’s dark journey to reveal the truth about the Ursla ultimately leads to an excruciating choice that will change her life forever. Read by Karen Ray. 11 broadcasts; begins Wed, Dec. 21. – L

Our Man* Monday - Friday 8 p.m.
The Cartographers, fiction by Peng Shepherd. 2022. A highly imaginative thriller about a young woman who discovers that a strange map in her deceased father’s belongings holds an incredible, deadly secret. Read by Michelle Junthén. 16 broadcasts; begins Thu, Dec. 1. – V Very Cold People, fiction by Sarah Manguso. 2022. A masterly debut novel about growing up in—and out of—the suffocating constraints of small-town America. Read by Parichay Rudina. Five broadcasts; begins Mon, Dec. 6. – L

Poumpur* Monday - Friday 9 p.m.

Whispers of the Gods, nonfiction by Cathy Golenbck. 2022. Baseball greats from the
Children and families

PACER Center offers many useful free or low-cost workshops and other resources for families of children with disabilities. Some in-person workshops are offered. Other workshops are online and livestreamed at this time. Advance registration is required for all workshops. At least 48 hours’ notice is needed for interpretation. Check out PACER’s website and link to the newsletter of statewide workshops that allows participants to pick and choose sessions designed for their needs.

Effective Communication with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team is noon-1:30 p.m. Mon, Dec. 5 online. Parents who are familiar with the special education process will learn communication strategies to help them advocate for their child at IEP team meetings.

Assistive Technology Supports for Students with Dyslexia: A Two-Part Series, Part 2 is 2-3 p.m. Wed, Dec. 7 online. Part 2 includes a review of a range of tools to support students with dyslexia throughout their school years. Tools demonstrated will cover test-to-text for various formats, audiobooks, and writing support.

Tech for Teens Club: A) Intro to Coding Virtual Reality is 10-11 a.m. Sat, Dec. 10 online or at PACER Center. Learn about virtual reality, how to create virtual reality experiences and then go exploring.

Tech for Teens Club: B) Coding Virtual Reality - The Next Level is 11 a.m.-noon, Sat, Dec. 10 online or at PACER Center. Take virtual reality coding to the next level and create a virtual reality experience.

Resources to Enjoy!
The Enjoy listings for upcoming events as well as webinars, fundraisers and fun events by and for disability services offer case for. Schedules may be subject to change. Some venues still may have mask and vaccine requirements. Please check with a venue or organization before making plans.

The Minnesota Access Alliance (MNAF) provides an Accessible Arts & Culture Calendar for arts patrons who use accessibility accommodations such as audio description, captioning, ASL interpreting and sensory-friendly accommodations. Link to more details at https://calendar.mnaccess.org. Be sure to check the listing or venue to find out its COVID-19 protocol and if an advance reservation is needed for the accessibility services.

Accessible events can be submitted to the MNAF Calendar (and MinnesotaPlaylist.com). A list of other venues follows the event listings.

To receive a free monthly events calendar email mactfactor@icloud.com and/or info@mnaccess.org. Ask for the entire events list or specific lists for ASL interpreting, captioning, audio description, sensory-friendly accommodations or a disability-related topics.

For other accessibility resources and upcoming webinars presented by MNAF, sign up for emails at https://mnaccess.org

Open Flow Forum
The Artists with Disabilities Alliance meets via Zoom 7-9 p.m. the first Thu of the month. Upcoming dates are Dec. 1 and Jan. 5. Virtually join artists with disabilities and supporters to share visual art, writing, music, theater and artistic efforts or disability concerns. Facilitators are Tara Inman, Kip Shanes and Springboard for the Arts. The gatherings are fully accessible. Anyone needing special accommodations should contact Andy Sturdevant at host organization Springboard for the Arts. Funding is available for access needs. FFI: 651-294-0907, resources@springboardforthearts.org

In 2021, over 1,100 Minnesotans received discounts on their insulin through the program, saving nearly $400,000, but many more are likely eligible for assistance. In 2020, the Minnesota Department of Health estimated that 8.8 percent of adults in Minnesota (about 390,000) had been diagnosed with either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, with more than 20,000 new cases diagnosed each year. FFI: https://www.mninsulin.org/

Learn EECO history
The Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities has posted an interview with Laurie Vasichek, retired senior legislator for the Equal and Opportunity Commission (EOC), discussing her work at the EEOC. Vasichek’s last case was EEOC v. Wells Fargo. Though the case was appealed to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals. One conclusion of the case that a job coach is considered to be a reasonable accommodation. FFI: https://mn.gov/mncc/

Many classes available
NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness) has set up a wide variety of free and in-person online mental health classes. Choices include Hope for Recovery, Transitions, Ending the Silence, Understanding Early Episode Psychosis for Families, Our Own Teen and Family to Family, Positive Psychology, Creating Caring Communities, smoking cessation, a suicide prevention class called QPR – Question, Persuade and Refer, a special OPR class for Agricultural Communities and many more.

The classes are designed for family members and caregivers, persons living with a mental illness, service providers, and also the general public. Find a complete listing of these classes and how to join in by going to naminm.org and clicking on “Classes” or go straight to https://naminm.org/education-public-awareness/classes/scheduled/.

Volunteer
Join community summit committee
The Autism Society of Minnesota (ASUM) Autistic Community Summit Committee is a group of community members who volunteer their time for the Autistic Community Summit. Apply online to be part of the committee. An informational meeting will be held in January 2023 to share information about committee membership and duties. This event is by and for autistics. The committee serves as the connection between AuSM staff and them autistic community. AuSM staff support the committee to create a accessible and enjoyable experience. Deadline to apply is Dec. 31. FFI: www.ausm.org

Be a delivery driver
Support the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Minnesota’s annual gift drive and be a delivery driver. Drivers will pick up and deliver items to NAMI Offices on Sat., Dec. 17 and deliver them to partner locations across the Twin Cities metro area. Drivers will need to be vaccinated, wear masks during volunteer work, and keep a distance from the public. Be a delivery driver by contacting info@mnaccess.org.

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East Grand Forks
218-733-3631
Victory Dunes
218-723-2602
1615 3rd Ave. N
Incorporate and rent restrictions apply. Metes & Bounds is an equal housing opportunity housing company.

Classifieds

Classifieds rates: $20 (first 30 words); $1/word beyond 30. Email classified to aclarsen@mnaccess.org.

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Greenwood Villas 218-631-3579
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• Locations also available in many other states. Income limits apply.
• Immediate openings in Hibbing, Willmar and Hibbing, Minnesota

Affordable Senior Apartments
• For qualifying senior households age 62 or better.
• Metro & Greater MN locations available. Income limits apply.
• Accessible apartments, available for seniors in these locations.
• Immediate openings in Worthington and Albert Lea, Minnesota

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• 24-hour Assisted Living Services
• Independent Living Services
• Resident Community Setting (Adult Foster Care)
• Eligibility for or selection of ASI services is not required to qualify for housing. ASI services are not available in all locations.

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