



WDC pushes win streak to 6 straight
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Dancing up a storm at the annual Spring Fling
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Wadena

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Green Island receives DNR school forest certification



Contributed / Kent Scheer

Green Island in Wadena is a sixty acre nature preserve that is open to residents and visitors. The new school forest certification through the Department of Natural Resources provides students and teachers with opportunities to learn from certified foresters, new curriculum and programs and more.

BY NICOLE STRACEK
Wadena Pioneer Journal

WADENA
For over a decade Freshwater Education students in Wadena have had the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature at Green Island. Owned by Kent Scheer, the 60-acre nature preserve is open to both residents and visitors and shares a border with the Alternative Learning Center. Green Island features an abundance of forested land, walking trails, sculptures, and hundreds of trees, plants, and flowers.
However, after years of

collaborating with the school district, Scheer made things official by partnering with Eric Weber, superintendent of the Freshwater Education Alternative Learning Center, to obtain a school forest certification for Green Island through the Department of Natural Resources.
Scheer said that over the years students have come to Green Island for school outings, and obtaining the official school forest certification is something that made sense.
“In the past students have utilized Green Island as a way to learn about sustainability, how

to identify birds, how to make snowshoes, identifying trees and much more,” said Scheer. The certification also opens the door for additional programs and funding opportunities for the school.
“The school will now have access to professionals in the Department of Natural Resources,” said Weber. “If they want to have a forester come in and do a lecture or a wild-life expert to help plan a program, teachers now have access to people and resources.”
Weber said the school also participates in bee-keeping, and also has a greenhouse that students

and teachers utilize for lessons.
The Freshwater Education school district includes 12 member districts. The Alternative Learning Center provides a wide range of educational services for students including special education programs, services and support for students in seventh through 12th grade.
With the new school forest certification Scheer said Green Island and Freshwater will have access to more opportunities that can support both students and teachers.
“We gain access to free

DNR on A9

Wadena Farmers Market is moving to the Wadena County Fairgrounds

BY NICOLE STRACEK
Wadena Pioneer Journal

WADENA — The Wadena Farmer’s Market is getting ready to set up shop in a new location at the Wadena County Fairgrounds.
The Wadena Farmers Market is moving from their usual location at the Wesley Hospital grounds

due to the upcoming construction projects planned for Highway 71 in 2025. Farmers Market manager Lacey Baumgart said it makes sense to make the switch this year to the new location — a move that she hopes will also increase the market’s visibility as well as attract more vendors as the new location allows for additional vendor space.
Baumgart is also new to her role as market manager, taking over in 2023 for Les Schwartz, who still plans to be a vendor at the weekly market to sell his maple syrup. However, Schwartz, who is still involved with the day-to-day market needs, said he is ready to hand off the responsibilities that



Nicole Stracek / Wadena Pioneer Journal

Wadena Farmers Market manager Lacey Baumgart gave an update on the new farmers market location at the Partners for a Healthy Wadena meeting in March.

coincide with running the market to someone younger as he is reaching retirement age.
The all-volunteer-based farmers market has been a staple in the

community for over a decade, providing the community with access to locally grown produce, baked goods and

MARKET on A8



Contributed / Sourcewell

Wadena-Deer Creek English teacher and cross-country coach Michael Brunsberg listens to the Sourcewell presenters at the “Educators of Excellence” banquet at the Northern Pacific Center in Brainerd on May 1.

WDC teachers, staff honored as ‘Educators of Excellence’

BY FRANK LEE
Wadena Pioneer Journal

BRAINERD — They are the teachers who made an impact. They are the school support staff people remember. They are “Educators of Excellence.”
More than 90 teachers and staff from schools in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties were selected by the school administration

Video

For video see, wadenapj.com.



for outstanding dedication, leadership, and innovation, and celebrated at a banquet at Brainerd’s Northern Pacific Center on May 1.
“We are dedicated to community and student

HONORED on A9

NYM Cultural Center announces Think-Off finalists

BY FRANK LEE
Wadena Pioneer Journal

NEW YORK MILLS — Put your thinking caps on. The Great American Think-Off is about to get real.
Organizers of the June 8 live debate hosted by the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center announced on April 30 the four finalists in the nonprofit’s annual

philosophical contest. The Cultural Center asked “Is free speech worth the cost?” and invited people to submit essays.
“We usually get a couple of hundred essays each year,” said Betsy Roder, executive director of the Cultural Center. “The most we’ve ever had was 800 essays and that

THINK-OFF on A10

WEEKEND WEATHER

H: 66
L: 43
FRIDAY



H: 66
L: 47
SATURDAY



H: 70
L: 47
SUNDAY



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HONORED CONTINUED from A1

success, and that same dedication is shared by our awardees here tonight,” said Dr. Paul Drange, chief regional solutions officer at Sourcewell.

From the Wadena-Deer Creek School District, Michael Brunsberg and Lindy Thompson were celebrated as “Teachers of Excellence” and Lisa Schmidt and Mary Wynn were honored as “Pillars of Excellence.”

“I think the world of Mr. Brunsberg. I think the world of what he does with kids,” said Norm Gallant, athletic director/dean of students at Wadena-Deer Creek High School, in a video played at the banquet.

Brunsborg is a high school English teacher and cross-country coach while Thompson is an elementary school teacher. Schmidt also works at the elementary school while Wynn works at the high school.

“Mike’s ability to make everyone feel valued and part of a community is unmatched. Whether in his English classroom or on his cross country or baseball teams, Mike celebrates each student’s uniqueness and encourages their creativity,” according to the awards program.

Drange said, “You will not find a more genuine and caring person than Mike. He makes every student and athlete feel valued, and he is constantly challenging himself to create the best experience possible for them.”

Thompson continues growing through ongoing certifications and technology education, and she also demonstrates a commitment to high-quality athletic development as a coach for girls’ tennis and girls’ track and field, according to the awards program.

“Lindy is always willing to tackle challenges and she fosters that same sense of determination and curiosity in her students,” Drange said. “Her positivity encourages them to do their best and her commitment to self-improvement makes every day in the classroom better than the last.”

Schmidt’s consistent and excellent communication helps colleagues ask informed questions and make the best decisions possible for their students, according to the awards program.

“Lisa’s kindness and compassion are obvious in every interaction she has with the public,” Drange said. “Lisa’s expertise in a wide range of skills keeps the building operating efficiently, and her smile keeps the building in good spirits.”

According to the awards program about Wynn: “Mary has high



Contributed photos / Sourcewell

The trophies awarded to Sourcewell’s “Educators of Excellence” were crafted by Ranger Made, a state-of-the-art, student-managed manufacturing company inside Crosby-Ironton High School.

expectations for students and is not afraid to challenge them, but her approach is so genuine that students respect and listen to her.”

“Mary brings a positive attitude to everything she does,” Drange said. “Mary’s infectious laugh and relationship building lift up everyone around her.”

The 11th annual Educators of Excellence Awards celebrate teachers throughout Sourcewell’s five-county service area. New this year, however, each school had the opportunity to select a “Pillar of Excellence,” or a school staff member, whose leadership has had a positive impact.

“It gives us an opportunity to think and publicly recognize some of the finest educational staff in the entire state of Minnesota,” said Rachel Logan, who works with Sourcewell and was an award presenter at the Sourcewell event on May 1.

In addition to the 50 teachers who were recognized, 46 non-teaching staff were honored this year, so the Educators of Excellence event was split into two days: April 24 celebrated teachers and staff in the northern half of the five counties, while May 1 featured the southern half.

“We see you and we hear you that teaching is a tough, tough job and such a rewarding job,” Logan told attendees.

An additional award called “Innovator of the Year,” given by the Innovative Schools Project, was presented to Jon Koenig and Dr. Lake Mathison, both from the Royalton School District.

“You are the ones that brighten the day of students, providing a role



Lindy Thompson, a Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary School teacher, accepts a Teachers of Excellence award from Rachel Logan of Sourcewell at an awards banquet in Brainerd on May 1.

model, mentor and friend to those who may not otherwise have that influence in their lives,” Drange said in conclusion about the Teachers of Excellence and Pillars of Excellence.

Sourcewell is a Staples-based regional service cooperative for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties. It is charged by Minnesota state statute to partner with education, government and nonprofits to boost student and community success with events like these.

Drange told this year’s honorees, “On behalf of the students, families and communities .. thank you for not only showing up but sharing your passion with the world and giving 100% every day,”

FRANK LEE is a features writer for the Wadena Pioneer Journal. He may be reached at 218-631-6470 or at flee@wadenapj.com.



Lisa Schmidt of the Wadena-Deer Creek School District accepts a Pillars of Excellence award from Rachel Logan of Sourcewell at an awards banquet in Brainerd on May 1.



Mary Wynn of the Wadena-Deer Creek School District accepts a Pillars of Excellence award from Rachel Logan of Sourcewell at an awards banquet in Brainerd on May 1.

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DNR CONTINUED from A1

forest management plans that are done by the area forester and it’s normally around \$600 to \$800,” Scheer said.

Additional benefits of the school forest certification from the Department of Natural Resources include free educational materials, access to support staff and activity boards, newsletters, grant opportunities, workshops, woodland stewardship plans, and more.

“Learning outside the walls of a classroom is such a benefit for our students, and Green Island has been a great asset for students,” Weber said. “Just walking through the forest is good therapy.”

With the new school forest certification Weber said the school plans to incorporate more into curriculums including

bringing in a forester from the Department of Natural Resources for lectures and a wildlife expert.

A designated school forest can also provide students with hands-on learning opportunities, increase physical activity and improve health, foster a life-long appreciation for nature, increase creativity, self-esteem, and motivation while providing students with disabilities access to nature in a safe setting.

“Learning outside the walls of a classroom has been a great asset,” said Weber, who also noted that he has data that shows that behavior incidents have gone down 30% with students who struggle with severe and emotional disabilities.

In addition to the Alternative Learning Center students, Weber said the Freshwater school district as a whole plans to

utilize Green Island for future educational purposes.

“We have 46 kids that attend the Academies school, and with the introduction of the school forest it has definitely contributed to a successful partnership,” said Weber.

Green Island in Wadena is a privately owned green space that is open to the public and is located at 850 Scheer Drive NE in Wadena.