

Local

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NORTHFIELD WEEKENDER

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Reducing the algae levels, invasive species and carp in Circle Lake are among the projects lakes association members want to work on with funds from a proposed Lake Improvement District. A district, if approved by county commissioners, would assess property owners to help pay for improving the water quality. (News file photo)

Proposed tax would advance lake cleanup

By SUZANNE ROOK
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Two Rice County residents are leading the charge to accelerate the cleanup of Circle Lake.

Brian Panettiere and Dean Sunderlin are stepping up efforts to improve the impaired lake water quality, telling the county Board of Commissioners Tuesday that they plan to ask approval for a Lake Improvement District dedicated to preserving and protecting Circle Lake.

The lake is considered impaired by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. A 2010 study found high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen in the lake, which often comes from fertilizers that find their way into their water. It also found two invasive species, curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil, both of which thrive on the nutrients.

Both plants interfere with recreational activities on bodies of water by forming mats on the water's surface and crowding out native plant species, according to the DNR.

The lake also suffers from an unsightly algae bloom each summer.

Carp, which the DNR considers "the most damaging invasive species," are plentiful in Circle Lake. The fish release phosphorus, and in shallow bodies of water like Circle Lake and muddy the water by disturbing plant life.

Panettiere and Sunderlin say they've already collected signatures supporting the district's creation from more than half the property owners who'd be included in the planned district. Once signatures are verified, they'll turn the documents over to the county auditor and proceed with their request.

Board members were supportive of the efforts overall, particu-

larly Commissioner Jeff Docken, who's worked with the members of the Circle Lake Association to help it get authorization for the taxing district. Circle Lake is in Docken's district.

As a Lake Improvement District, its five- to nine-member board initially appointed by the commissioners, would be permitted to assess fees on properties in the approved district. Board members must be district residents and any funds collected need to be used to satisfy a Department of Natural Resources-approved plan designed to clean up the lake.

Panettiere says 169 property owners will be affected by the district's creation. The number of properties impacted is larger, but property owners will be assessed just once annually no matter the number of parcels owned, he said.

Each property owner will be assessed \$300, giving the lake association about \$51,000 annually to begin cleanup. Properties included in the proposed district border the lakeshore, have lake access or affect the inflow of water into Circle Lake.

Panettiere said the funds are needed to supplement fundraisers.

Next up for the lakes association board: completing the bylaws.

County Administrator Sara Folsted asked Panettiere and Sunderlin to return for another work session with the completed bylaws for the board's review. Then, they said, a required public hearing can be set and the issue can be scheduled for a vote.

Commissioner Jake Gillen endorsed the cleanup efforts, and noted how frequently the water quality of Circle Lake has been a topic of discussion in the last 12 years.

Said Commissioner Galen Malecha, "You certainly have my support any time you can improve the water quality."

Northfield Elementary School Parent Teacher Organizations are Making A Difference

By CHERYL STRIKE
Special to the News

The Northfield Healthy Community Initiative recently recognized Northfield elementary school Parent Teacher Organizations/Booster Clubs with the June 2017 "Making a Difference" Award.

The award is given out monthly to community members or organizations that help make Northfield an even better place for young people.

The local elementary school PTOs came together this school year to organize book drives at each of the three schools, in an effort to ensure that all Northfield children have books in their homes.

"What started out as a goal of collecting at least 300 gently used books turned in to more than 2,400 books," said Connie Nelson, HCI Board Member and Northfield Promise Reading Team Co-Chair. "The PTO/Booster Club leadership at Greenvale Park, Sibley and Bridgewater deserve a huge thank you for coming up with a community-based project that students at all three schools could get excited about."

"This drive was especially impactful because it subsidizes one of our Northfield Promise Reading Team goals of providing access to books for all Northfield children," said Nelson. "Because of the large number of donated books, we will be able to keep our free community bookshelves stocked, and launch our Book Bike project in area neighborhoods this summer."

While HCI celebrated all members of the elementary PTOs/Booster Clubs, key officers of these groups were specifically recognized:

Sibley PTO
Sara Ailabouni



A Northfield parent and his son take a break after their ECCE class to do some reading at the free community bookshelf at the Northfield Community Resource Center. This bookshelf is one of several housed in various locations throughout Northfield (Submitted photo).

Kathy Klein
Pasha Quas
Amanda Tracy
Bridgewater Booster Club
Angie Gonzales
Erin Hall
Shari Sneary
Greenvale Park PTO
Arleene Gallardo
Rebecca Stoufis
Heidi McCormick
Tiffany Malecha

The books are available at free bookshelves located throughout the Northfield community, including local businesses, healthcare offices, the Northfield YMCA and

the Northfield Community Resource Center. The bookshelves are maintained through a collaborative partnership between the Northfield Early Childhood Initiative Coalition, Northfield Rotary and Northfield Promise.

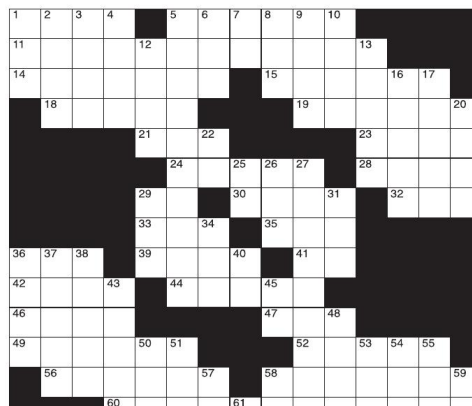
The Northfield Healthy Community Initiative and the Northfield News present the Making a Difference Award cooperatively. If you know an individual or group that you would like to nominate for this award, visit www.northfieldhci.org for nomination guidelines and the easy-to-complete application, or find HCI on Facebook. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis and are selected by a review team of HCI board members and local youth.

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