

SHOOTING ON THE CLOCK

35-second shot clock coming
to high school basketball / A6

A LIFE OF MUSIC

Sharon Barton celebrates 50
years playing the organ / B1

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Passing the spatula

After more than 20 years,
Joan Halter of Joanie's
Catering is retiring

BY KAY JOHNSON
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If Joanie's Catering of Hutchinson has been your go-to place for special events, don't panic. Although its founder Joan Halter, 71, is retiring Jan. 1, her daughter Rachael Wright will continue the family business with the same services, website and phone number.

It's something Wright has been doing since her mom eased from day-to-day operations. Like Halter, Wright brings to the job a background in food service. Her day job is working as the lunch lady at Park and Tiger elementary schools in Hutchinson. "She loves it," Halter said. "It works well with the catering business."

While Wright takes over the heavy lifting and weekend commitments of her catering side gig, Halter plans to be a snowbird January through April, dividing her time between the warmer southern states of Texas and Florida. She'll spend the rest of the year in Hutchinson, so she'll be available should her daughter need an extra pair of hands.

"I melt the butter and stir the gravy now," Halter said with a smile.

CATERING IS IN HER BLOOD

The 4-H Cafe at the McLeod County Fairgrounds serves as home base for the longtime

Catering to A4 ➤



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY JOHNSON

The counter is full of ingredients, so Joan Halter of Joanie's Catering is ready to roll up her sleeves and start making Christmas treats.

What to do with \$7.7B

With historic surplus,
local lawmakers call tax
relief a top priority for
2022 session

BY BILL SALISBURY AND DAVE ORRICK
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The state of Minnesota will head into 2022 with a record \$7.7 billion projected budget surplus for the current two-year budget cycle, state finance officials announced Tuesday.

The eye-popping figure would be enough money to pay more than \$1,000 to every Minnesotan, if the projection holds.

But that won't happen. Some of the money is already spoken for, and leaders of both political parties appear to have other plans for the rest — as do various interest groups that wouldn't mind a piece.

So how will it be spent, or will it be spent? Impossible to say at this point.

The projection — and it's important to remember it is only a projection — set the pieces Tuesday for a chess match that will likely play out through May as the state's politically divided government grapples with what could shape up to be an unprecedented sea of riches in an election year.

On Tuesday, Gov. Tim Walz and fellow Democrats generally hailed the projected surplus as providing a historic opportunity to pay for programs and policies they've supported in recent years, such as creating universal paid sick leave and reducing the cost of child care. Republicans, on the other hand, urged caution, warning of the dangers of inflation and suggesting "tax relief" is in order to counterbalance the state's largesse.

WHY SO BIG?

The ballooning projected surplus — in February it was projected to be \$1.6 billion — is part of a national trend for state and federal government finances that is resulting mainly from an increase in tax revenues amid a pandemic recovery that continues to surprise economists.

Some \$5.1 billion of the projected surplus comes from increased collections from personal income, sales, and corporate income taxes, according to the budget forecast, which was produced by the state Management and Budget office in consultation with the state economist and a private economics firm. A relatively small amount, some \$364 million, comes from lower-than-expected

Surplus to A4 ➤

Hutchinson woman killed in fire

BY STEPHEN WIBLEMO
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One person was found dead following a fire at Country Club Terrace mobile home park Wednesday afternoon.

According to a report, Hutchinson police and Hutchinson firefighters responded to the fire at about 3:45 p.m. at 448 California St. N.W. The owner of the mobile home, Helen Marie Norling, 80, of Hutchinson, was reported to be in the home and unable to evacuate. Smoke and flames were visible upon arrival.

Police officers and firefighters made multiple attempts to enter the home and rescue Norling, but due to heavy smoke and extreme heat, the rescue attempts were unsuccessful. Firefighters later found Norling's body while conducting an interior search of the home.



STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN WIBLEMO

One person was found dead inside a mobile home in Lot 105 of Country Club Terrace mobile home park, Hutchinson, following a fire Wednesday afternoon.

One Hutchinson police officer was treated at Hutchinson Health for smoke inhalation and released.

Allina Ambulance and the State Fire Marshall also responded to the fire, and the cause of the blaze is under investigation.

Historic clash brewing at Litchfield G.A.R. Hall

A 100-year-old agreement
demands Memorial Hall
remains in original state

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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As their numbers dwindled and members saw the inevitable demise of their organization, Union Army, Navy and Marine veterans sought to ensure the physical monument to their service continued.

That's when members of the Grand Army of the Republic Frank Daggett Post made a deal with the city of Litchfield, deeding their hall to the city. The donation came with a handful of stipulations, most notably that the hall would remain the same as it was when members gathered there in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

More than 100 years later, that agreement has become a source of conflict between Grand

Army of the Republic descendants, city leaders and the Meeker County Historical Society.

Specifically at issue are clauses in the 1885 contract — as reported in the Nov. 28, 1885, edition of the Litchfield Saturday Review — that require the G.A.R. Memorial Hall to remain essentially as it was when actively used by members a century ago.

The city "shall maintain and keep in repair the said premises, and the said Memorial Hall thereon situate, according to the intention and design of the building, as in this instrument expressed; and the said Village of Litchfield shall never permit the same to be used for, or diverted to any other purpose, whatever."

The agreement also states that the city "shall carefully collect and scrupulously preserve in the room of said Memorial Hall ... all the war relics, flags, guns, chairs, pictures, and all other personal property and belongings of said Frank Daggett Post, and arrange the same in and about said room, so that said room may retain the appearance, as nearly as practicable, of still being

occupied and used by said Frank Daggett Post ... as nearly as practicable, forever."

When the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic — a national organization of descendants — held their annual meeting at the Frank Daggett Post in August, members noticed immediately that terms of the 1885 agreement are being violated.

The Memorial Hall has been overrun, in the opinion of at least some members, by unacceptable items that change the hall's appearance beyond what is expressed in the deed.

That brought swift rebuke from the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, the oldest hereditary, congressionally sanctioned organization in the United States, whose executive committee drafted a letter to Litchfield Mayor Keith Johnson and City Council members.

The letter asked that the city follow the 1885 agreement and remove items from the Memorial Hall that are "both new and of different time

Hall to A2 ➤



FILE PHOTO

The G.A.R. Hall is located at 308 N. Marshall Ave. in Litchfield.



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