

LITCHFIELD

Independent Review

\$1.50 ON NEWSSTANDS
PUBLISHED SINCE 1876

Merry Christmas!

MAKING THE RIGHT MOVES

Continuity lifts expectations for Litchfield dancers / 12



REMEMBERING A PRAIRIE CHRISTMAS

Terry Shaw describes holiday for early county settlers / 3

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023



Lake Ripley Elementary teacher Mary Carlson and third-grader Michael Edwardson play a game of “guess the sign” as part of one of the ASL club’s activities.

BY KENDALL LARSON

BRIDGING THE COMMUNICATION GAP

Sign language club helps Lake Ripley Elementary second-graders connect with their classmate

BY KENDALL LARSON
klarson@hutchinsonleader.com

Sign language is experiencing a surge in popularity at Lake Ripley Elementary in the form of an American Sign Language club.

The ASL club started last year for second-graders at Lake Ripley after students showed interest in learning how to communicate better with their deaf classmate, Michael Edwardson, son of Meghan Jahnke, who is also deaf.

Matt Heywood, teacher Mary Carlson, ASL interpreter Jacklyn Skrunkrude and Jahnke started the club, and Carlson and Jahnke are continuing it this school year.

“Because there was a lot of interest and it was successful, we decided to continue the club this year,” Carlson said. “Matt and Jacklyn were unable to assist this year. Mr. (Chris) Olson, the principal, is very supportive and assisted in funding incidentals and hiring one

additional staff member to assist with supervision. It is important to have leadership by adults who are deaf. That is more of a challenge here in central Minnesota.”

Sign language has become increasingly important, with more than 300 different sign languages spoken worldwide, and more than 72 million deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. In the United States, ASL has emerged as the most used sign language among these communities.

Jahnke emphasized the significance of sign language as more than just a means of communication — it is a crucial aspect of deaf culture.

Club to 2 >

School Board certifies 3.96% levy increase

Truth in Taxation hearing draws no public comment on \$6.3 million levy

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
schacherer@hutchinsonleader.com

Litchfield Public Schools’ levy will increase 3.96% — or \$240,600.25 — next year.

The 2024 levy of \$6,322,868.47 received certification from the Litchfield School Board during its meeting Dec. 11.

The board’s approval came following the annual Truth in Taxation hearing, during which district Business Manager Jesse Johnson offered a detailed breakdown of the various funds operated by the district and its funding sources.

The Truth in Taxation hearing is required by law, originally passed in 1988 and amended in 2009. Johnson explained that during the public hearing, the district is required to present information about the current budget and its revenue and expenses from the prior year, as well as information on the proposed tax levy and percentage change from the previous year. The public then must be allowed to make comments.

School to 4 >



Jesse Johnson

Hitting all the right notes

LHS band program sees participation numbers grow

BY KENDALL LARSON
klarson@hutchinsonleader.com

Litchfield High School’s music program is orchestrating a symphony of success, with three ensembles and a surge in student engagement.

“We have three groups right now,” band director Bailey Benoit said. “We’ve got our concert band, which is new this year, our varsity band and our wind ensemble.”

LHS has experienced a boom in student interest in band at both the middle and high school, Benoit said.

“We have over 90 students in our sixth-grade band, 70 in our seventh-grade band and 16 in our eighth-grade band,” she said. “To give some perspective, our graduating senior class last year only had 13 members in it.”

Knowing those numbers are on the horizon, Benoit put together a concert band that could give every kid a seat in the LHS band program.

“Currently, we have 30 students in the concert band, and we do not have a cap on certain grades having to be in certain places,” she

Band to 4 >

CHRISTMAS, CANDY CANES AND SANTA, OH MY!



STAFF PHOTO BY BRENT SCHACHERER

Santa Claus got a lift in a Bobcat supplied by Welker Construction as he rode down the Candy Cane Parade route Thursday evening. The parade drew hundreds to Litchfield’s streets as they soaked in the Christmas spirit and collected candy and other goodies thrown by parade units along the route. See more photos on Page 2.



We break news at independentreview.net, facebook.com/LitchfieldIndependentReview and twitter.com/LitchfieldIndependentReview.

INSIDE
TRIBUTES/4 BACK THEN/4 OPINION/5
FAITH/6 PUBLIC SAFETY/8 CLASSIFIEDS/9

TO REACH US
PHONE: 320-693-3266 FAX: 320-693-9177
MediaNews Group



7 92511 00059 3