

Groveland

Lake Minnetonka Daughters of the American Revolution clean headstones.

Page 3



Fall sports

Area prep football teams off to fast starts in opening week of action.

Page 24

Thursday, September 8, 2022

Eden Prairie mayor, city council candidates join in forum

By NATALIE CIERZAN
natalie.cierzan@ppgecm.com

The League of Women Voters held an Eden Prairie City Council candidate forum on Aug. 31, with all six candidates in attendance.

Incumbent Ron Case and candidate Tracey Schowalter compete for mayor, while incumbents Mark Freiberg and Kathy Nelson face candidates Greg Jehman and Micah Olson for two city council seats.

Residents were able to attend the forum in person, as well as view the forum live online. The city will also make the recording available on its website leading up to election day on Nov. 8.

Pat Robles from the League of Women Voters Plymouth and Mayzata chapter served as the moderator. Written questions for the candidates were submitted by

See **Forum**, Page 7

Area veterans, legislators enjoy Lake Minnetonka boat tour and talk priorities

By NATALIE CIERZAN
natalie.cierzan@ppgecm.com

Local veterans and legislators came together to enjoy a boat tour on Lake Minnetonka, which included a stop at Big Island, as they discussed topics regarding Minnesota veterans.

The Lake Minnetonka boat tours for veterans have been ongoing for the last 13 years, courtesy of Gabriel Jabbour, the owner of Tonka Bay Marina and former mayor of Orono, whose boat is used for the tours. Jabbour has played a significant role in maintaining Big Island over the years and has been engaged in working with Orono since the 1970s. He views the tours as keeping a promise he made to the veterans.

"I told the veterans 'as long as I can do this, I will take you out there. I will always be available to you' ... This is a continuation of a promise, and it's a promise by me and the city of Orono to them that we will do what we can." he

See **Boat**, Page 6



(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE CIERZAN)

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Larry Herke provided closing remarks and invited others to share with the group. Both legislators, veterans and other officials came together for the final Lake Minnetonka tour of the summer on Gabriel Jabbour's boat on Aug. 31.

Boat

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

said.

While there are several tours throughout the summer held for veterans, the last tour of the summer usually also includes Minnesota Legislators from the Military Advisory Group, which is made up exclusively of veteran legislators, local legislators, commanders from the Commander's Task Force and others.

The CTF is made up of nine state-level veterans service organizations including The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Jewish War Veterans, Marine Corps League, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

According to Greg Peterson, a board member from the MN Veterans 4 Veterans Trust Fund, the legislative priorities for the next session include amending a homestead classification for widows of veterans; looking for



Both legislators, veterans and other officials came together for a Lake Minnetonka tour on Gabriel Jabbour's boat on Aug. 31.

(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE CIENZANO)

more funding for post-9/11 bonuses; building a new veterans's home in Hastings; and getting new license plates for air medal recipients, Jewish war veterans and free purple heart license plates.

The group toured Lake Minnetonka while chatting about commonalities and priorities and docked on the Big Island for a brief visit. Minnesota Veterans 4 Veterans board member Dean Ascherman provided background on the island as the tour went on.

"It's a critical time for the new commanders and new leadership of the veterans organizations to meet with the legislators

so they can set the tone for, here's what we think we need over the next legislative session" and to gain some acceptance for some of the things that the various organizations feel that they need," he said about the event.

For Ron Haugen, the CTF chair, the idea of the event was simple. They wanted to allow veterans organizations to meet with legislators, the actual people working on veterans benefits.

Rep. Donald Raleigh (R-Circle Pines) spoke about the MAG being present on the tour and giving the legislature a different perspective that allowed them

to see from the "ground floor" regarding what's happening in the various veterans organizations.

"Getting the idea of the perspective from the individual organizations, (bringing) the veterans together, (listening) to what their concerns are and then they're able to be their voice. So it's not that we listen to any one specific group. It gives us the opportunity to listen to all the groups and then... it gives us the opportunity in a very friendly setting to get to know each other," he said, adding that he and other politicians in MAG have comradery and can approach legislative issues from the standpoint of all being on the same team.

Chair of the Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee Rep. Rob Ecklund (DFL-International Falls) agreed with Raleigh regarding comradery.

"There's only two Democrats on the boat today and I mean two Democrat legislative members on the boat today, but you wouldn't know that by the conversations we're having. The Veterans Committee is very largely non-

partisan. It doesn't matter what our political background is, our alignment is. We all strive to work for what's best for the veteran's community," he said.

Big Island Veterans Camp history

The Big Island Veterans Camp originated in 1921 when the Federal Board for Vocational Education decided to create a summer retreat for disabled veterans on Big Island, according to the MN Veterans 4 Veterans Trust Fund. Four years later a Board of Governors represented by four different veterans groups was approved. By 1931, more than 3,500 veterans used the camp annually.

The camp went on to provide inexpensive summer vacations for veterans and their families into the 1970s. In 1978, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs took over the camp. By the early 1980s, winter vandalism became a problem and aging buildings were no longer in code compliance. The camp closed in 1984.

In 1985, a new Board of Governors decided to clean and repair the camp, reopening in 1989.

The camp remained open throughout the 1990s but closed in 2003 after the Board of Governors voted to sell the land and use the proceeds for other veteran's needs.

Once the veteran's camp property became available, the city of Orono decided permanent public ownership was important. Jabbour represented the Orono in discussions about the property with Three Rivers Parks, Hennepin County and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A financial package from combined entities was created to pay the camp's \$5.7 million price, including \$850,000 from the Minnetonka Creek Watershed District that was given in exchange for a conservation easement that would preserve the open space and natural character of the 56-acre property. A total of 45 acres of the property would remain undeveloped, with 11 acres able to be developed for recreational and educational use. The property was purchased in 2006 and the park officially reopened in 2008. In 2018, a master plan was created for the park's development.