

Speed dial surprises

I really shouldn't try dialing telephone numbers by memory. At least once a week, I do just that and I end up dialing a wrong number. Now that nearly everyone has caller ID on his or her telephone, you can't get away with simply hanging up when you realize you've made an error. I've tried it and had the wrong person return my call, asking, "Did you try to call me?"

Now if I reach an answering machine with an unexpected voice, I still leave a message. "Hi, it's Rhonda. Please don't call me back, I dialed your number by accident!"

The time I thought I could save by not thumbing through the telephone book is spent apologizing—or sometimes in conversation with the person contacted accidentally.

Odds are pretty good that if you dial a wrong number with a Cook County prefix, you will know the person you reach. You might end up with an invitation to lunch or find out that a friend isn't feeling well and needs some cheering up.

I frequently call the North Shore Federal Credit Union when I mean to call Gene's Foods or vice versa. I end up chatting with Daniel at the grocery store when I wanted to check on my checking account balance.

My mother came home from Arizona this spring with an interesting wrong number tale. Her cell phone number is one digit different than that of Walter "Butch" Schulte of Wally's Towing in Grand Marais. She was surprised to receive a call while wintering in sunny

Apache Junction from someone on Highway 61 looking for help getting out of the ditch. She was unable to help them, but ever since she has carried the Wally's Towing number with her in case she receives another wrong number emergency call.

UnORGANIZED TERRITORY



Rhonda Silence
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The reason I am thinking about phones and wrong numbers is because of a delightful wrong number incident last week. I was listening to local community radio, WTIP, during the Pop Quiz. As most readers probably know, WTIP asks a question "of a trivial nature" each weekday around 9:30 a.m. The first caller with the correct answer wins a "fabulous prize." I've won a few nice prizes—gift certificates for Buck's Hardware, Great Gifts in Lutsen, and a

cup of coffee at Java Moose. However, I don't win very often. I occasionally know the correct answer, but I'm not fast enough with my dialing. Frequently when I get through to Roger at WTIP, I'm told that someone has already provided the correct answer.

Last week I knew the answer to a trivia question immediately. I hurriedly dialed, trying to beat the rest of Cook County. And I inadvertently replaced the 387-prefix of the WTIP phone number with that of local cell phones.

Of course I reached someone I know. Answering my incorrect phone number was none other than Lyle Saethre, of Grand Marais, mural painter extraordinaire. Anyone who knows Lyle is familiar with his voice—and his wry sense of humor.

I realized my mistake and began to apologize and Lyle assured me I wasn't disturbing him. He explained that he was used to wrong numbers—he gets a few a week always around the same time—at 9:30 in the morning. He laughed and asked, "So, what's the right answer?"

I didn't win Pop Quiz that day, but I certainly had a good laugh. Happy dialing!

*Misery, misery,
mumble and moan!
Someone invented
the telephone,
And interrupted
a nation's slumbers,
Ringing wrong
but similar numbers.*
Ogden Nash

Gitche Gitche Gumee



Teenagers injured in ATV accident

Rhonda Silence

Two teenagers from White Bear Lake, MN, were injured in an all-terrain vehicle accident on Friday, July 31, 2009 on Bent's Road in Grand Marais. The injured teens—a 14-year-old female driver and 17-year-old male passenger were taken to Cook County North Shore Hospital by private vehicle.

According to the sheriff deputy investigating

the accident, the driver was wearing a helmet; the passenger was not. One of the youths was transported to a Duluth hospital by Lifeflight helicopter and the other by Cook County Ambulance. At press time, the extent of their injuries is unknown.

The reason for the accident is also unknown, however Cook County Law Enforcement said the cause was most likely driver inexperience.

1% tax proponents pitch their projects

Jane Howard

The Cook County 1% Local Option Sales Tax Committee met for three hours Monday, August 3, 2009 to decide which community improvement projects to include in a late-fall referendum, but in the end they decided they need still more time to gather information and weigh their options.

Close to a dozen community stakeholders attended the meeting in addition to nine of the 11 elected officials appointed to the committee.

The list of potential projects is down to seven, with a biomass-fueled energy plant and payoff of golf course bonds back in the running after almost being taken off the list at the last meeting on July 27.

The committee continued to talk about projects that would require significant ongoing subsidies vs. projects that would generate revenue. Consultant Mike Fischer, in attendance by speakerphone, recommended that they give special consideration to projects that could be paid partly by the tax while leveraging funds from other sources.

County board chair Fritz Sobanja asked representatives of each project to pitch their project to the committee.

Birch Grove Community Center

Tofte town supervisor D.C. Olsen said cost estimates and site drawings have already been prepared for improvements to outdoor recreation facilities at Birch Grove Community Center that would include tennis and basketball courts, a hockey rink, and a bike path trailhead. Ongoing maintenance has and will continue to be provided by volunteers and the Town of Tofte, he said.

Recreation facilities in Grand Marais

Cook County Community Center Director Diane Booth said that a committee spent three years creating a plan for recreation facilities on Community Center grounds that included sports such as tennis, basketball, hockey, dance, curling, baseball, and skateboarding. After that, a pool committee asked them to include an indoor pool in their plan. Some funding could be lost because the process of implementing the plan has been so slow, Booth said.

Countywide broadband

County information systems director Danna MacKenzie reported that a feasibility study has priced broadband Internet distribution to the entire county at \$50.9 million, two-thirds of which could be funded by a federal stimulus grant. The other \$17 million could be funded by the 1% tax and by revenue from subscribers who would be able to get phone, Internet, and TV service through broadband at least 10-15% cheaper than they pay now.

In a separate conversation, MacKenzie said the fastest service Quest now offers in Grand Marais is far slower than the system being proposed, which would allow telecommuters in Cook County to connect to their corporate networks as fast as they could if they were at corporate headquarters. Fifteen years ago, she said, many local businesses did not see a need for email.

Similarly, she believes broadband will be a necessary component of staying competitive in the computerized world of business.

Arrowhead Electric Cooperative, which had been approached about taking on the project, will not be the owner/operator of the network. According to MacKenzie, the quick turnaround needed to apply for the stimulus grant along with a lack of collateral required by banks led to Arrowhead Electric not applying for the grant. The county, however, could qualify because it has more access to funding.

The broadband committee is proposing that part of the matching funds come from the 1% tax and part from revenue from customers using broadband.

"This is the next-generation utility that any community will need to survive," said MacKenzie.

"This is the roads and bridges of the 21st Century," said committee member Jim Boyd.

"It's visions of grandeur," said County Commissioner Fritz Sobanja. How much would the population grow if more people could telecommute from Cook County, and does the community want to grow? he asked.

Well-paying Internet jobs are better than minimum-wage tourist jobs, Commissioner Bob Fenwick responded.

People are already making lodging choices on whether broadband is available, MacKenzie said.

Library

The Grand Marais Library board is proposing an \$850,000 addition to the current building that would not require added staff, Commissioner Sobanja said. Library usage has grown in the last 20 years, and more space is being dedicated to computer use for patrons to access the Internet, he said.

Community Center building

A new pool building originally conceived as a \$6 million project has grown to \$11 million, City Councillor Tim Kennedy said, possibly beyond the community's ability to maintain.

Mayor Sue Hakes agreed that the community could afford a smaller facility with operating costs similar to the current pool if the city and the county shared the costs. She said she would be "crushed" if a swimming pool were not included in the 1% tax projects. "Please figure it out," she said. "I'll help!"

The concept of a community center started as a multi-purpose facility for residents, Diane Booth said. She advocated for one facility with activities and space for all ages.

Whatever is built needs to generate revenue, Commissioner Fenwick said. A \$6 million facility on the current Community Center site might need as much subsidy as a \$12 million building in the tourist park, he said, adding that the whole project would not need to be funded solely by the 1% tax.

Mike Fischer said he would trim the building plan down to reduce costs.

Superior National Golf Course

The current Superior National at Lutsen Golf Course bonds will be paid off in 2015, according to golf course committee chair Mark Sandbo, but the course would be solvent if the bond was paid off now. Each year, \$130,000 in capital improvements is needed to make it a top-notch course, he said. Bond payoff would leave more money for marketing, and more marketing would bring in more revenue. More revenue could pay for more improvements, and more improvements would bring more golfers, Sandbo said.

The community does not feel a sense of ownership in the course, Fenwick said, even though the community does own it.

Biomass energy plant

County-owned buildings would see energy savings of \$600,000 a year if a biomass-fueled heat and power plant were built in Grand Marais, Tim Kennedy said. Engineer Chuck Hartley, who has done preliminary work on the proposed project, estimates county buildings would see a 40% reduction in annual energy costs, Kennedy said.

More biomass than would ever be needed by such a plant is already available in Cook County, said Buck Benson of the Cook County Local Energy Project (CCLEP). Over 100 communities in Europe are already heating their towns with biomass. "It [would be] like having a stimulus package every year," he said. The plant would create jobs and would pay for itself, thus not requiring ongoing subsidy.

Forest fire hazards would be reduced if biomass could be used for heat and electricity, Commissioner Jim Johnson said. Ecologically, not burning brush in outdoor brush piles makes sense. Emissions are extremely low with plants like this, Benson added.

A grant sought jointly by Grand Marais and Ely, Benson said, would bring enough funding to extend piping down the streets of Grand Marais, allowing homes to tap into the system and share operating costs with the county, thus reducing its energy costs even further.

Fritz Sobanja thanked those in attendance for all their work on the 1% tax committee. "I hope we can move forward on all of these things," he said.

»Another meeting will be held at the courthouse Monday, August 10 at 7 p.m. to decide which projects to include in the referendum and what amounts would be funded by the proposed tax.

CORRECTION:

»In the August 1, 2009 article *Heil Smith charged with theft*, it was reported that there was a discrepancy in the Gunflint Realty company trust account. Although that information was in the initial police report, that is incorrect. The company's general business account had discrepancies, which resulted in the criminal complaint filed by the County Attorney.

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