



BRIEFS

Atmosphere to play Verizon Ballroom

MANKATO — Minnesota hip-hop group Atmosphere will perform Feb. 20 in the Verizon Wireless Center Ballroom.

The concert is part of the "Welcome to Minnesota" tour — featuring 20-year veterans Atmosphere, with Kill The Vultures, Big Quarters, Mally and BK One. Doors open at 6 p.m.

About the tour: "With returns to Mankato, Bemidji, St. Cloud, Duluth, Rochester and Minneapolis, this year's tour looks to be another sellout. Atmosphere's seventh studio release, 'The Family Sign' (Rhymesayers Entertainment) harnesses front man Slug's (Sean Daley) unparalleled prose and is considered the group's most personal collection."

Tickets go on sale 11 a.m. Friday and are \$22.

Tickets can be purchased at the Verizon Wireless Ticket Office, Ticketmaster outlets, via phone at 800-745-3000 or online at Ticketmaster.com or JadePresents.com.

— The Free Press

Judge spares Minn. defendant

HASTINGS — A former girls' hockey coach from Burnsville has pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting a teenage girl, but he won't go to prison because he has a brain tumor.

Dakota County Judge Richard Spicer told 57-year-old James B. Vandusartz there should be consequences for his actions. But the judge said Monday there were no consequences he could give.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune reported Vandusartz was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor about a year ago and given 15 months to live. The judge said a sentence of jail or community service wouldn't have made sense, so he sentenced Vandusartz to 10 years on probation.

Twin Cities home prices fall in Nov.

ST. PAUL — Home prices in the Twin Cities fell in November as foreclosures and short sale activity helped drive the median home price down.

The Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors says the median Twin Cities home price fell to about \$149,000 in November. That's down 10 percent from the same month a year ago.

Minnesota Public Radio News reported distressed properties, which tend to sell at steep discounts, accounted for 44 percent of completed sales last month.

Meanwhile, traditional, non-distressed home prices dropped about 9 percent to around \$187,000.

Judge threatens to toss diocese suit

MINNEAPOLIS — A federal judge is threatening to throw out a Nevada man's lawsuit against a diocese in southwestern Minnesota over claims he was sexually abused by an Irish priest.

U.S. District Judge Joan Ericksen ruled Monday the plaintiff has failed to prove that her court has jurisdiction. She gave him seven days to fix the problems or she'll dismiss the lawsuit.

The lawsuit alleges the Diocese of New Ulm knew of past abuse allegations against the Rev. Francis Markey and failed to warn parents or children.

The plaintiff is not identified in the lawsuit. The suit accuses the diocese of fraud and conspiracy for failing to disclose what it knew about Markey when the priest was assigned there in 1982.

— The Associated Press

Renovation work taking a Winter break



File photo

Two floods in 2010 hobbled Land of Memories Park in Mankato, spurring an ongoing rehabilitation and reconfiguration project.

Land of Memories undergoing several changes

By Brian Ojanpa
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Renovation work has finished up for the season at Land of Memories Park, which was beset by four natural disasters in a 13-month period.

The ongoing project aims to relocate the park's campground, reinforce flood-ravaged Blue Earth River banks and expand the Frisbee golf course.

Mankato Director of Public Works Mark Knoff said the work was spurred by damaging weather events that included hail, tornadic winds and two floods — the culminating one coming in autumn 2010.

"There was 6 feet of silt in places from that fall flood," he said.

The project will cost more than \$500,000

with reimbursement coming from the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

A restroom damaged in fall 2010 flood has been removed and work to relocate the campground to the park's northwest corner will start next year, Knoff said.

Plans also call for reinforcement of 60-80 feet of flood-eroded riverbank and removal of the existing campground road.

Knoff said the reinforcement "armoring" also will serve as flood mitigation.

The Frisbee course work, including the planting of prairie grasses to reduce maintenance, will be done following the riverbank upgrades.

Land of Memories Park just off Highway 169/60 also is used by local soccer teams and includes a boat ramp and a pavilion for event rentals.

Franken staff makes case for NCLB changes

By Brian Ojanpa
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MANKATO — Members of U.S. Sen. Al Franken's staff held a Mankato gathering Monday to effectively tell educators and others what they already know: The federal No Child Left Behind education law needs reform.

"I think everyone realizes there needs to be changes made in it," said Franken staffer Dan Solomon prior to meeting with a handful of people at Rosa Parks Elementary School.

The session was part of a statewide swing by Franken representatives to update local communities on efforts being made to revamp the controversial mandate.

Enacted in 2001, NCLB supports standards-based education reform on the belief that establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes.

But in practice it has become clear that the education reform initiative itself needs reforms, and a bipartisan bill passed by the Senate a couple of months ago includes four amendments authored by Franken.

Solomon said the key component of the reform bill is the push to get rid of Adequate Yearly Progress directives by moving away from what Solomon termed an arbitrary measure of standards.

Moreover, reporting of test results from those measures has been less than timely for schools, resulting in frustration for educators.

Solomon said one school principal likened receipt of test data to "autopsies" on students because they arrived so late.

In an appearance in Waseca in October, Franken

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Women's show proceeds mean \$16K for KatoMayo

The Free Press

MANKATO — The Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato got a little financial help from some friends as it continues construction of its \$29 million emergency department.

The Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato Auxiliary on Monday presented a check for \$16,000 to the hospital to be used for construction costs. The money came from proceeds of the 2011 Women's Show.

"The Women's Show is the largest health and wellness expo for women in the region," Adeline Riha, president of the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato Auxiliary, said in a statement. "In addition to being a great source of medical information and health screenings, it's a fundraiser to help us support the mission of Mayo Clinic in our region. We are pleased to help fund the new Emergency Department."

The plan — the largest capital project undertaken in the entire Mayo system in 2010 — includes a new ER,

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Organizers unveil new two-day Mankato Marathon format

Events will move to Saturday, Sunday

MANKATO — A few changes are in store for the 2012 Mankato Marathon, including a shift to two days of races and race-related activities.

The 2012 Mankato Marathon, Relay Marathon, Half Marathon and 10K will be held on Sunday, Oct. 21, 2012. The 5K, KidsK, Sport and Health Expo, Speaker Series and Pasta Feed will take place the day before.

"After two years of assessment, the date was changed due to multiple factors including a better fit into the race calendar, a chance for better weather and more," a statement issued by Marathon officials said. "Our change to Saturday/Sunday races will allow the opportunity for a full weekend of events and growth in all events."

The 5k and KidsK will move from Sibley Park to the Minnesota State University campus due to growth.

"Sibley Park just wasn't big enough to hold all the runners and spectators we had for the Mankato Marathon 5K and KidsK in 2011," said Race Director Mark Bongers of Final

Stretch Inc.

Moving the two Saturday races to campus prompted the move of the Sport and Health Expo, Speaker Series and Pasta Feed to campus as well. The Expo and Speaker Series will be held in Myers Field House and the Pasta Feed also will be on campus.

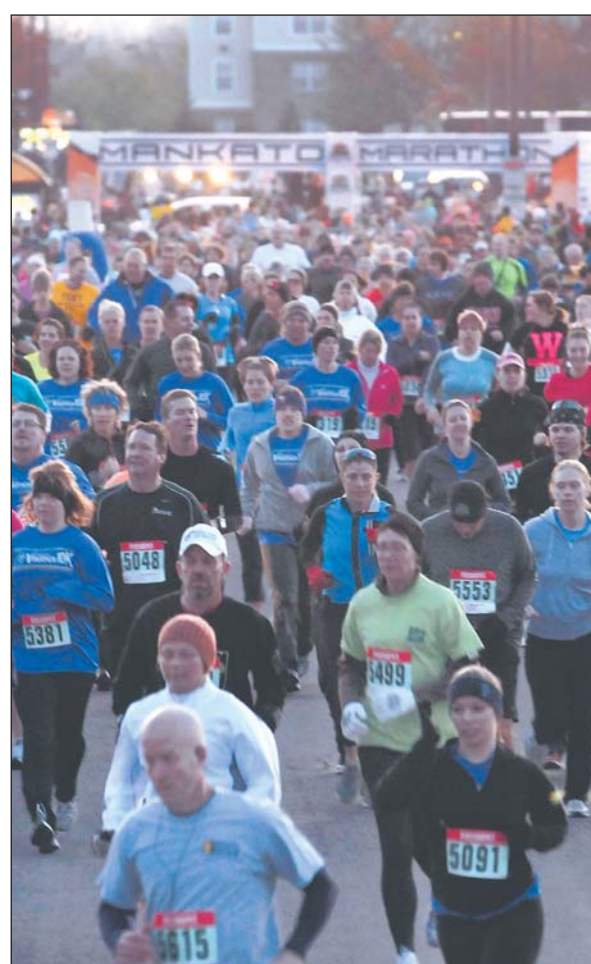
"Having all of Saturday's races and activities right on campus will make for a convenient and relaxed environment for the race participants," Bongers said.

The KidsK will be divided into age categories of 6 and younger and ages 7 to 12, and will be opened up to 400 participants to accommodate the growth of the event. The 5K will be opened up to 1,000 runners and the 10K race will be opened up to 1,200 people.

More information about the 2012 races will be released in the coming weeks. Registration opens Thursday.

Visit mankatomarathon.com for more information.

— Robb Murray



Runners start the 10K race at the 2011 Mankato Marathon. Beginning in 2012, the Relay Marathon, Half Marathon and 10K will be held on Sunday, rather than Saturday, and all pre-race events will take place the day before the main races.

File photo

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