

Brookfield & Elm Grove

THIS MONTH

DECEMBER 2021

Parade victims' memories honored; community rallies to aid injured

By Jake Ekdahl
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and Darryl Enriquez
Special to Conley Media

WAUKESHA — After a man rammed an SUV into the Waukesha Christmas Parade Nov. 21, at least six people have died and 62 were injured.

The identified fatalities (to date) are Tamara Durand, 52; Wilhelm Hospel, 81; Jane Kulich, 52; LeAnna Owen, 71; and Virginia Sorenson, 79, and Jackson Sparks, 8.

Kulich was a longtime employee of Waukesha's popular Dave's Restaurant. Dave's owner Jose Angel Suarez said she was with them for four or five years, but still came in and helped out at times and regularly visited; she last stopped in Nov. 19 and was excited about going on college visits with her kids, he said.

"She was very socialized with the customers," Suarez said, noting her smile, talkative nature and that she never missed work. "She was kind, like she thought of everybody," said Dave's server Sherry Moede. "She was just a great mom and she was always positive."

Taylor Smith, Kulich's daughter, described her mother as "a beautiful soul. She lit up everyone's lives... My mom was just such a wonderful human that positively impacted everyone she met. We will miss her so much. She was taken from us way too soon."

A photo of Kulich honoring her memory was posted on the door to Dave's on Nov. 23. Suarez said they learned of her death the previous day. When visiting

the restaurant, her go-to order was a patty melt with fries and a side of tartar sauce.

A verified GoFundMe dedicated to her describes Kulich as a "loving, beautiful and charismatic mother, grandmother and friend to so many. The world is a much darker place without a woman like this in the world." The GoFundMe will help cover costs of saying final goodbyes.

Kulich isn't the only person affiliated with Dave's affected. Romelia Perez, a former Dave's employee, and her daughter Camila Perez are both among the injured. Romelia has had three surgeries and is on a breathing tube, her verified GoFundMe page states. Camila has fractures and has underwent surgery; she was listed as stable three days after the incident.

Multiple members of the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies were among those killed.

"Those who died were extremely passionate Grannies," the group posted on Facebook. "Their eyes gleamed... joy of being a Grannie. They were the glue... held us together."

The group said as more information and updates become available, they'll be posted.

"Please keep them, their families, friends, the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies and everyone (whose) lives have forever changed in your thoughts and prayers," they said.

According to the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen, Tamara Durand (then Tamara Frinak) rescued a man from the Wisconsin River in Wausau in 2009.



Photos by Mary Catanese/Special to The Freeman

Kambrie Frizzell and Alderman Cory Payne joined many gathered on Nov. 22 at Cutler park for a vigil honoring those killed and wounded during the Waukesha Christmas Parade a day earlier. Frizzell was in the crowd when the incident occurred. She's a nurse and helped with the injured.

One of the people hit was also Erick Tiegs, the son of a Caledonia firefighter, Don Tiegs.

"Very little is known at this time about the long road to recovery," his fundraiser, which is run by the local firefighters' union, states. "Currently Erick is awake, but heavily medicated. He has a broken femur, skull fracture, broken ribs, C4 vertebrae fracture, a bruised lung, and a pneumothorax (collapsed lung)."

Fundraising

After the deaths and injuries at the parade Nov. 21, GoFundMe mobilized a crisis team to ensure donated dollars go to the right

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Jessica Lahner keeps the flame burning out as her daughter, Britton, holds the candle during a vigil at Cutler Park on Nov. 22 for those killed and injured in the Waukesha Christmas Parade.

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Parade

From Page 1A

place and into the hands of those in need. A page of verified GoFundMe fundraisers related the the Waukesha Christmas Parade is now active.

Dance team decimated in parade

A competitive dance team of local girls was psyched for its upcoming season. At a kickoff competition on Nov. 20, the team captured second- and third-place finishes.

The next day, their optimism vanished at the tragic Waukesha Christmas Parade. Five young dancers were under intensive hospital care, following the tragedy.

A red SUV drove through the Xtreme Dance Team on West Main Street at the Five Points, injuring many of its young performers.

The man who allegedly drove that SUV, Darrell Brooks, 39, was charged with five counts of intentional homicide, with a sixth expected to be filed following 8-year-old Jackson Sparks' death. He was ordered held on \$5 million bail.

As a result, the troupe needs help, financially and emotionally, according to a statement issued by the dance team.

The mother of a 10-year-old dancer spoke on Tuesday about the horrors they experienced at the parade and the psychological trauma that now clouds their future.

Sarah Sallman, 32, a lifelong Waukesha resident, spoke to The Freeman after arriving home with her daughter from school counseling. Louella Sallman is a 4th grader.

Sallman told her story to encourage community support for the battered Waukesha dance team.

"We were excited because this was the start of competition season," Sallman said. "Not really sure where we go from here."

Sallman recounted that she and another mom were carrying the troupe's banner in front of the group's pickup truck. The dancers were behind the pickup.

"I heard the SUV, turned around and saw it take out



Image courtesy of Sarah Koolman of Milwaukee Mom

How to help

■ Waukesha County Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County have joined to create a "United for Waukesha Community Fund." The fund will support the needs of families impacted by the parade tragedy. To donate, visit: <https://waukeshafoundation.org/parade>. Checks and cash donations are accepted at any Landmark Credit Union branch and checks should be made out to the United for Waukesha Community Fund.

■ For a page with all verified Waukesha Christmas Parade GoFundMe fundraisers, visit <https://rb.gy/lrzajs>.

■ To donate to Erick Tiegs, visit <https://rb.gy/hcm2sa>.

■ Bridge Church has set up two accounts, one for families impacted by the parade tragedy, and the second to meet community needs. To donate there, visit <https://rb.gy/ge6ouh>.

■ A GoFund Me page is accepting donations for the Xtreme Dance Team as well. To donate, visit www.gofundme.com/f/helping-the-waukesha-xtreme-dance-team-dancers.

many of the girls," she said. "One of the girls at the rear of group flew in front of me. That's how hard they were hit."

Louella Sallman was not in the SUV's line of travel.

In the aftermath, Sallman said she saw bodies, poms, shoes and other clothing in the road.

Many girls were hospitalized, including the five in the ICU, according to sources.

One of the dance team members who was injured is 11-year-old Jessalyn Torres.

"The red SUV blew through the barricade," said her uncle, Ryan Kohnke, of what he witnessed. "He stopped for a moment, a police officer

tried to stop him. He hesitated for a moment and then it was if, I don't know, that he decided he was going to do what he was going to do, and he gunned it."

Torres was in the path of the SUV and Kohnke saw her after. "She was injured badly," he said. Those injuries include a broken pelvis, dislodged kidney, lacerations on her lungs and remaining kidney, internal bleeding, bruising, an a skull fracture.

Kohnke said Torres woke up briefly and said "tell them to glue me back together," which he said shows who she is, "a stubborn, resilient child, who's got some sass to her."

The list of injured by Tuesday swelled to 62, all struck by the SUV that plowed through the crowded downtown parade route.

The 8-year-old who died was not a dancer, Sallman said.

A statement issued Nov. 23 by Xtreme Dance said in part: "Our dancers have a multitude of serious physical injuries, of those, five dancers are currently in the ICU.

"Additionally, we are only beginning to understand the mental trauma. We need time to heal and understand. We are truly grateful to have the support and the love from everyone in our community and beyond."

The team is comprised of three troupes from 8th graders to preschool. Their dance routines include jazz, poms and hip hop, Sallman said. The team performs in Waukesha parades and local sporting events.

"It's a very serious dance team that rehearses three to four nights a week for two to three hours a night," she said. "It's a second family because we're there constantly."

Louella and her mom spent some time at school with the school counselor, psychologist and principal.

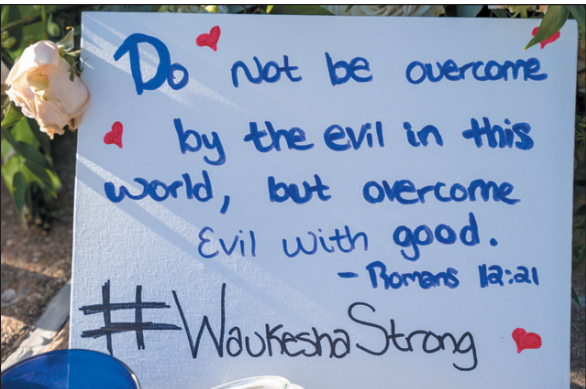
"They allowed kids to come back, color, play in the gym, see their classmates," Sallman said.

Will it be enough? "It's going to be difficult, but Louella knows she is surrounded by people she knows."



Photo by Mary Catanese/Special to The Freeman

Jessica Madiaga writes a message on one of the crosses representing those killed during the Waukesha Christmas Parade. Many gathered for a Nov. 22 vigil at Cutler Park.



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

A sign offers a message of hope at Veterans Park following the mass-casualty event during the Waukesha Christmas Parade.



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

Shining light

WAUKESHA — A ceremonial menorah is lit at The Rotunda following a ceremony held by members of the Chabad Jewish Center on Tuesday night.

A press release about the event said, "We believe that One Community, One Heart and lighting a menorah will bring a message of hope and light the crosses of denominational lines. As a community, it is so important that OUR Collective light is rekindled to show that we will not be dragged into darkness because of the senseless acts of one. We will unite in our love of mankind, and show our support proudly by gathering together and shining a light."

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Ponto seeking re-election

Brookfield mayor touts record on public safety, economic development

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto is seeking another term and will appear on next year's April ballot.

Ponto told The Freeman one of his priorities as mayor has been public safety, and the city has recently added two police officer and two detective positions. Brookfield was also recently made aware of a three-year SAFER grant for about \$3 million which will add nine paramedic/firefighter positions beginning early next year.

Ponto has served as Brookfield's mayor since 2010, and was elected in 2014 and 2018. He hold's a law degree from the University of Wisconsin Law School, a master's in Public Affairs from Princeton University and a bachelor's in Economics from Lawrence University.

Before his time as mayor, Ponto worked as an attorney for more than three decades. He said that background, with experience in real estate and contracts, has proven helpful as mayor. "Of



Submitted photo

Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto smiles as he files his papers at the municipal office to run for a new term.

course, a lot of what the city does involves real estate and contracts," he said.

Ponto said he also tries to work closely with Elmbrook Schools, the local public school district, and described it as "one of the strongest points that Brookfield has." He noted there are also excellent private schools in the area, like Brookfield Academy.

During his tenure, Brookfield has seen four years exceeding \$100 million in net new construction — two of those years being the most

recent ones. Target, Landmark Credit Union, Milwaukee Tool, Portillo's, Lifetime Fitness, the Brookfield Conference Center, Trader Joe's and more are among the projects that have taken place recently.

"I have worked very well with the Common Council and very well with the department heads," Ponto said. "It's really a team undertaking."

Ponto filed his papers for re-election this month and will appear on the April ballot.

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Elmbrook School Board approves budget, lower tax rate

Tax rate lowest since 1992

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — The Elmbrook School Board has passed a budget that includes the lowest tax rate since at least 1992.

The rate for 2021-22 is \$9.00 per \$1,000 of assessed value compared with \$9.90 in 2020-21. The preliminary rate for 2021-22 was \$9.93 and that \$0.93 difference from the final rate amounts to a 9 percent change. In 1992-93, the tax rate was \$13.60. The new rate amounts to reduction of about about \$270 on a \$300,000 home compared to last year.

Municipal valuation of homes, which districts do not control, can vary. Depending on where they live, residents may see different tax rates.

Before presenting the budget to the board, Elmbrook Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Kristin Sobocinski credited Director of Finance Amy McBain for

her work on it.

"This is a year long process, it's not something that's just put together very quickly," Sobocinski said.

Beginning in November, the board uses initial forecast data to begin crafting its budget for the coming year and goes to committee in April for restructures and reallocations. The Finance & Operations Committee reviews the preliminary budget in May, and the full board discusses it over the summer.

There's a subsequent adjusted budget in October, because unknown factors during the summer months become much more tangible in the fall, such as hiring, carryover amounts from the unclosed fiscal year, and other adjustments.

One of the highlights of the budget is a substantial increase in state aid for Elmbrook, the second highest increase in Wisconsin. Sobocinski announced the "huge increase in state aid, which is great" but empha-

sized it's "tax relief only, it's not additional money for the district." The increase in aid is about \$5.9 million.

Other boosts include a \$1.19 million 4K grant, which the district did not anticipate, \$129,307 more than expected in open enrollment revenue, \$122,335 more than expected in federal grants and Medicaid and \$260,000 more than expected from local sources due to field trips, admissions, and summer school transportation fees.

School Board member Glen Allgaier praised Elmbrook staff for the budget and pointed out there's no inflationary increase from the state, and the district managed to avoid using some available federal funds, which had more restrictions and guidelines.

School Board Vice President Jean Lambert also thanked the district staff who made the budget possible.

Superintendent Mark Hansen said there "is really quality fiscal management in this room. And I don't want to lose sight of that."

The Corners to create 'Candy Corners Lane' holiday light installation

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD — The holidays are quickly approaching and The Corners of Brookfield is increasing its offerings this season to entertain visitors.

The open mall and residential development along Bluemound Road will introduce Candy Corners Lane, a custom light installation and experience, that will include walk-through displays, pop-up holiday activations and other special events throughout the season.

Candy Corners Lane will go through December. The display will feature more than 4,000 feet of lights and there will photo opportunities throughout Market

Square, including a 17-foot tall walk-through gingerbread house and a 20-foot wide candy cane arch.

Candy Cane Lane will offer festive fun every week with pop-up activations like caroling and more. A local Girl Scout troop will carol on Dec. 3 at 6 p.m. and the Bach Chamber Choir will spread holiday cheer from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Dec. 10.

Habitat for Humanity will host its annual Gingerbread Build at Von Maur on Dec. 4 from noon to 4 p.m.

On Dec. 5 at 4 p.m., join Chabad of Waukesha for a Chanukah celebration, featuring a candy cane menorah.

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County Board unanimously passes budget

Lowest tax rate in 33 years

By Jake Ekdahl
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WAUKESHA — The Waukesha County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the 2022 County Budget on Nov. 9.

The 622-page document was combed through all of last month by committees and for the second year in a row the budget was approved without any amendments — that's only happened twice in the last decade.

“This is the accumulation of many months of preparation and review (put) in by many levels of government,” said board member and Finance Committee Chair James Heinrich.

The 2022 tax rate drops from \$1.76 to \$1.68 per \$1,000 in home value, which is the lowest in 33 years. Of the new tax levy, the greatest portion, about \$1.2 million, is set to go to county justice and public safety with \$825,000 going to the sheriff's department, \$215,000 for public safety programs including emergency preparedness and 911 dispatch,

\$59,000 for the medical examiner's office and \$153,000 for courts and the district attorney's office.

Looking ahead, Heinrich voiced wariness over inflation outpacing the state-imposed tax levy limitation and predicted that could lead to a “tightening” of some department budgets and an eventual decline in services the county can offer residents.

Waukesha County's unique budget process is more collaborative than most, with departments drafting budgets independently and coordinating with the county executive and county board.

“We have an unanimous vote for the budget, 22-0,” said County Chairman Paul Decker. “This is the most important thing that we do.”

New maps finalized

The new district boundaries for supervisors' districts have been approved as well.

Redistricting is a once-per-decade process for updating supervisor districts to accommodate population change. The county held several public input sessions during the map-drafting process.

Heinrich said Tuesday the population deviation from

the most populous district to the least is less than 1,000 people and about 5%, which is considered acceptable.

Cummings recognized

Longtime County Supervisor Kathleen Cummings was recognized after her resignation last month.

Supervisor Darlene Johnson rose during the meeting and said she wanted to “acknowledge and thank Kathleen Cummings for all the years of service.”

Cummings, who lives in Waukesha, served on the board for two decades.

Days after her former colleagues' accolades, Cummings was charged Nov. 9 with seven felonies — five counts of false swearing in an election setting and two more of filing fraudulent election certifications after allegedly lying about her residency and not residing in one of her elected districts.

In a response to a request for comment, defense attorney Donna Kuchler said in an email: “We plan to vigorously defend these allegations.”

The defense also has filed a motion to dismiss that case alleging the complaint is defective. Cummings is to make an initial appearance in court Dec. 10.



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

On the move

BROOKFIELD — The historic Brookfield Junction building was moved from 2844 N. Brookfield Road to 2825 N. Brookfield Road on Nov. 4. About 50 people came out on the cold evening to watch the move, which took place at 10 p.m. The building will sit on blocks at its new location for about a month, then a new foundation will be poured for it so the building can house a coffee shop at a later date.

Rodriguez launches bid for lieutenant governor

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — Assembly Rep. Sara Rodriguez, D-Brookfield, announced Nov. 8 she's running to serve as Wisconsin's next lieutenant governor.

“I think I bring a unique perspective to Wisconsin,” Rodriguez said, adding she's a nurse, small business owner, and has served as an executive in health care organizations — she's also the only Democratic state legislator to live in Waukesha County.

Rodriguez won't be the only Brookfield resident seeking the job. Longtime communications director for Sen. Ron Johnson Ben Voelkel is also a Brookfield resident and is running on the Republican ticket —



Rodriguez

he'll be facing off against state Sen. Patrick Testin, R-Stevens Point, and Lancaster Mayor David Varnam in the Republican primary.

On the Democratic side, Sen. Lena Taylor, D-Milwaukee, has also announced she'll be running for lieutenant governor. The winner of the Aug. 9 primary will be paired with Democratic Gov. Tony Evers as his running mate on the 2022 ticket.

Rodriguez appeared alongside Evers in Brookfield just last week, when the latter was on a tour across the state touting the final version of the maps put forward by the People's

Maps Commission for the once-per-decade redistricting process.

Rodriguez, who started a health care consulting business in 2020, was elected to the Assembly last year, taking a seat that had been under Republican control for years. “Public health is my passion,” she said, emphasizing her intention to partner with Evers on making his agenda successful and advising him on health care or other topics.

Currently Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes is running for U.S. Senate next year against incumbent Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, and will not be seeking re-election.

This is Rodriguez's first run for statewide office. To learn more about Rodriguez's campaign, visit saraforwi.com.



Submitted photo

Calhoun project completed

BROOKFIELD — Surrounded by local officials, Brookfield Mayor Steve Ponto smiles as he prepares to cut the ribbon on Calhoun Road on Nov. 24. Just in time for Thanksgiving, Ponto cut the ribbon to open the new four lanes of Calhoun Road from North Avenue to Capitol Drive, a major corridor for the area.

“I thank and commend all those involved in this important road project,” Ponto said in a statement. “We get a real sense of how important this road is by how much it was missed during construction and how happy we are that it is open. All three of Brookfield's Fire Stations and its Police Station are on Calhoun Road.”

Court of Appeals reverses Elmbrook case decision

Suit filed after Hassan named to School Board

By Jake Ekdahl
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BROOKFIELD — The Wisconsin Court of Appeals has reversed a decision made by a Waukesha County judge to dismiss a lawsuit filed against the Elmbrook School District.

The case was filed last year by Brookfield resident Cheri Mastel, who sought a petition for a writ of mandamus to compel Elmbrook to provide her with applications of those who were not “final applicants” for a vacant School Board position, as well as contact information of the seven applicants who were not ultimately chosen for the position.

Eight applied to fill the vacancy, five were selected as “final candidates” and one, Dr. Mushir Hassan, was ultimately chosen and appointed to fill the seat. There was subsequent scrutiny over

the vote tally that led to Hassan's appointment, but he later went on to win an election for the board and is currently serving a new term.

The district sent Mandel some of the request information, but not all. She alleged in her petition some of the redactions and withholdings were unlawful.

According to the circuit court website, Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Michael Bohren granted a motion to dismiss the writ of mandamus last year. The decision was subsequently appealed to the court of appeals.

Citing case law, the appeals court judges found Elmbrook did not need to protect the identities of the three applicants who were not final candidates if “they did not provide such a written indication to the district.”

They also found “the district did not provide a specif-

ic explanation for why it was redacting Hassan's professional information.”

The judges found Mastel's petition did not, however, sufficiently “state a claim for relief in relation to the Declarations of Eligibility” of the applicants applying to fill the vacancy. They stated Mastel's records requests did not sufficiently indicate she was requesting those specific records.

Ultimately, the decision made by Waukesha County Circuit Court was “affirmed in part; revised in part and cause remanded for further proceedings,” said the judges.

Mastel's attorney Tom Kamenick said the court “applied the law exactly as written. Elmbrook was trying to stretch exceptions in the law far broader than they were intended to go.”

The district has been represented in the case by attorney Joel Aziere of the firm Buelow Vetter.

Elmbrook did not offer comments and has previously stated it does not comment on active litigation.

Brookfield Town Board approves Longview Drive commercial development

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD — Plans for a 4,500 square foot commercial development including a fast-food restaurant with a drive-thru at 21765 W. Longview Drive saw conditional approvals before the Town Board on Nov. 2.

Town Clerk Veronica LaGuardia said the item was conditionally approved unanimously, contingent upon a non-annexation agreement, a letter from the fire department and the town

engineer and the developer supplying neighboring property owners with a construction schedule and details pertaining to the retaining wall.

According to Gary Lake, building inspector with the town, the submitted rendering included a Starbucks. The proposed commercial development includes three tenant spaces, one of which would be the drive-thru space with a proposed Starbucks.

The property was previ-

ously zoned for an office development, however, the owner saw little interest for that use, Lake said. The site is currently a residential site next to Kulbir Sra, Shorewest Realtors.

The Town Board tabled plans for a proposed Shake Shack with a drive-thru at 585 N. Barker Road. Lake said the item was tabled due to lighting concerns and will likely be brought back to the Town Board sometime around early December.

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