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The FREEMAN

Brookfield & Elm Grove

THIS MONTH

OCTOBER 2021

Bus driver shortage challenges schools

Applicants sought at several companies in area

By Jake Ekdahl
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262-513-2657

BROOKFIELD — School districts across the country, including some in Waukesha County, are grappling with a shortage of bus drivers.

“One of our greatest challenges during the first few weeks of this school year has been to provide a stable busing system,” said Elmbrook School District Chief Strategy Officer Chris Thompson in a recent letter to families.

Elmbrook utilizes Go Riteway for its bus service and at its peak, needs 61 bus drivers to serve all district students.

“Currently, Go Riteway has 50-52 regular route drivers, leaving us 9-11 short each day,” Thompson said. “This shortage can sometimes be filled by Go Riteway office staff, stand-by emergency drivers, or company mechanics or other miscellaneous staff, but on any given day we have been short 3-6 drivers, forcing the cancellation or delay of 6-12 public and private school routes each day since September 1.”

He said co-curricular events have had to be can-

celed or adjusted as well. Go Riteway announced a 11% increase in wages for drivers to \$18 per hour last week.

Elmbrook isn't the only district encountering challenges. Waukesha School District Deputy Superintendent Joe Koch said the district is “having to make adjustments for sports and activities.” He praised First Student, the bus service Waukesha Schools uses, for “doing a great job of patching things together. We very much appreciate their partnership. We know they're short on drivers.”

Arrowhead School District Superintendent Laura Myrah said the district hasn't experienced negative consequences of bus driver shortages so far this year. They use Dousman Transport for their bus services. In the past, when bus shortages have occurred, students and families have been asked to transport themselves to co-curricular events or in some cases a coach bus has been hired — that's not been the case so far this year, though.

New Berlin School District Chief Financial and Operations Officer Patrick Miller said the first couple



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

Bus drivers leave Hartland North Elementary School on Sept. 21. School districts around the county are grappling with a shortage of bus drivers.

days of the school year saw issues with a few buses being late, but that was more due to road construction than staffing. He said the district last year switched to a new system that staggered the start times of elementary schools and consequently reduced the number of buses needed.

“Fewer buses mean fewer bus drivers are needed to complete the routes,” he said.

They use Durham for their buses; the company's starting wage for drivers is \$20.65 per hour.

Elmbrook has begun soliciting interest and building training resources for part-time staff, coaches and some administrators to pursue their CDL certification in order to offset some of the driver shortage.

First Student Location Manager Joni Sablich said applicants are welcome. “To retain and recruit drivers, we have increased starting wages to \$19 an hour,” she said. “We also offer a sign-on bonus for new drivers.”

To apply with First Student, visit workatfirst.com.

“One of our greatest challenges during the first few weeks of this school year has been to provide a stable busing system.”

— Chris Thompson,
Chief strategy officer,
Elmbrook School District

To apply with Durham, call 262-784-7278.

To apply with Go Riteway, visit goriteway.com/drive-with-us.

To apply with Dousman, visit <https://rb.gy/xzzndi>.

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INSIDE



Focus on you at ‘selfie museum’

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Peppered with love

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Brookfield ‘selfie museum’ offers alternative to photography studios

By Derek Johnson
Special to The Freeman

BROOKFIELD — Taking a good selfie or making a fun viral video can be hard, but Selfie WRld in Brookfield offers an easy way to get the perfect shot without going to a traditional photography studio.

The “selfie museum”, at 16700 W. Blue-mound Road, Suite 400, is a do-it-yourself photography studio. It offers 16 unique rooms, each with its own theme, back-ground and furniture, for people to take selfies, professional pictures or video in. There are rooms designed for almost every kind of fun photoshoot imaginable, from one decorated with 1950s décor to one that's little more than a room with some lockers and a neon sign.

A \$20 entry ticket to the studio gets one person a selfie stand, a ring light and an hour to take as many pictures as they want in any of the photography booths. Attendees need to bring their own camera, and professional photographers are welcome to come along if they buy their own individual ticket, although pets aren't allowed.

The unique alternative to a traditional photography studio opened in June, and it's co-owned by Indiana-based entrepreneur DJ Brown. It's part of a large chain of similar studios that has more than 20 locations across the country.

However, although it may be part of a

chain that's not based in Wisconsin, Morgan Hoppe, one of the managers at the Brookfield location, said that the staff are almost all social media influencers from the area, and in Hoppe's case, the reason she landed the job is because she made a viral video about the fun social media-driven spaces.

“I posted a TikTok that I wanted a selfie museum,” she said.

Now that she has the job, she said that she's excited to give other influencers a special way to go viral in Wisconsin, where there aren't any other Selfie WRld locations.

“This is something that's very foreign to the Midwest,” Hoppe said.

Hoppe also noted that the studio is pre-pared to deal with any pandemic-related restrictions as they come. While masks aren't required right now, she said that if there is another public safety mandate, the studio will follow every safety precaution to ensure people can keep making cool content.

The studio is open on Tuesdays through Fridays from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m., on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and on Sundays from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. Walk ins are welcome, and tickets can also be purchased in advance online at <https://selfiewrldmke.com>. Any-one interested in renting the entire studio can also do so by contacting the Brookfield location directly.



Submitted photo

An example of a picture people can take at Selfie WRld in Brookfield.



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Elmbrook School Board approves COVID-19 thresholds

Absences never crossed 10% threshold last year

By Jake Ekdahl
jekdahl@conley.net.com
262-513-2657

BROOKFIELD — The Elmbrook School Board voted 5-1 on Sept. 14 to approve COVID-19 thresholds that adapt school protocols to the level of coronavirus transmission in the area.

The key indicator in the threshold plan is the level of student absences at each particular school for three-day periods. At 0-5%, parents decide on masks for students, masks become required for staff and recommended for students at 6-9% and required for everyone at 10% or higher or if there are 41 or more COVID-19 cases per day.

Elmbrook Chief Strategy Officer Chris Thompson said Sept. 14 no school ever reached that 10% threshold last year, and the highest was just under 6%. He said at Brookfield East High School, 10% would be more than 130 students out at the same time.

When it comes to classroom, athletic teams and activities, the thresholds are 0-20%, 21% and 33%. At 33%, the format goes virtual for 7-14 days.

At the school level, reaching the 10% threshold would trigger a board meeting with discussion regarding a temporary virtual option.

“We would schedule a meeting, we would have a discussion,” Thompson said. “The board would determine next steps.”

The district is also monitoring staffing for four key groups: teachers and assistants, bus operators and lunch operators and custodial services. The only group that appears challenged currently based on the district’s dashboard is bus operations.

“Transportation has been our biggest challenge, I would say at the start of the year,” Thompson said.

“Last year we (learned) that our staffing strategy was just as important as our anal-

ysis of the disease and sometimes it determined our response to the disease.”

Last month, the board approved a plan that allows parents to opt their children into mask-recommended, mask-required and virtual learning options.

The three options are available for grades 5K-6th, while 4K has mask-recommended and mask-required but no virtual option.

For grades 7-12, masks are strongly recommended but not required for all students and staff. Under that plan, the district reserved the right in its plan to require masks in the case of a significant COVID-19 outbreak.

“I’m very encouraged by the data that says we didn’t even get to the yellow area (in the) last year,” said board member Glen Allgair. The three risk tiers are colored green, yellow and red with red being the most critical and yellow being moderate.

School Board President Scott Wheeler said the community is divided on the topic and any decision will have some level of unpopularity.



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

A late-summer afternoon in the park

Greg Leulpins throws a rock to his 5-year-old dog Roux at Fox Brook Park's dog swimming area on Sept. 14.

Callisters Christmas to open location in Brookfield strip mall

BROOKFIELD — For the first time, New Berlin-based Callisters Christmas will open a seasonal location outside of an area mall. This year, Callisters plans on selling Christmas ornaments and other holiday items at 16900 W. Bluemound Road, in the strip mall near JoAnn Fabrics and Kirklands.

The Bluemound Road store will open Oct. 28.

Callisters Christmas is a multigenerational family business that has been selling Christmas ornaments in area malls since 1991.

“Being family owned, we are beyond excited for this new chapter, it means more time together doing what we love under one roof,” said owner Michele Zelenak.

raSmith promotes Mortensen to assistant director

BROOKFIELD — David Mortensen has received a promotion to assistant director of the site design services division at raSmith. Mortensen has served as a project manager at raSmith since 2019. He has more than 15 years of civil engineering and project management experience.

“David contributes a unique skillset to the site design group,” said Dave

Cleary, director of site design services at raSmith. “David’s perspective, as well as his experience on projects in Wisconsin and throughout the Midwest, will be important as he focuses on growing our local and regional presence from our Brookfield office.”

Mortensen will continue to serve his clients as their primary contact. A few of his projects at raSmith

include: Amazon last mile delivery stations in San Jose, Santa Fe Springs, Richmond, and San Francisco, CA; the RampUp Bradford Beach All-Inclusive Access development in Milwaukee; several site improvement projects at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center; and several site improvement projects for local school districts in the Greater Milwaukee area.



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Emotional support dog to stay with Victim Assistance Program

County officials obtain new funding

By Dave Fidlin
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA — For most of 2021, Pepper has been offering comfort to children and adults, simply by doing what dogs do best: demonstrate unconditional love.

A tentative plan that is to be finalized at the end of the month points to the purebred Labrador retriever's continued service in the Waukesha County District Attorney Office's Victim Assistance Program.

Jen Dunn, director of the program, said her division has secured a total of \$7,800 in new grants and donations that will help ensure Pepper continues to bring healing to people who have encountered assorted traumatic and abusive situations in the year ahead.

The majority of the new funding — \$6,000 — has come from individual donations. The remaining \$1,800 has been linked to a program known as the Children's Justice Act.

"It was very much a joint effort," Dunn said of the effort to secure new funding.

Dunn, who recently went before the County Board's Judiciary and Law Enforcement Committee, described the use of a specially trained emotional support dog as "creative and proactive ideas for helping people."

Since her arrival, Pepper — who knows more than 60 commands — has been of service to children as young as 7 years old and to adults in their 60s.

In her brief time within the program, Pepper's roles have included meeting with victims during prosecutor interviews and amid trial preparation. Pepper also has sat with witnesses before they get on the stand and offer their testimony.

"This has worked in so many ways," Dunn said. "There are already a lot of images that will stay with you."

The grant funds and donations go toward a number of incidentals the county's general tax levy-fortified operating budget does not support. Among them: veterinary care, food and equipment.

Pepper's arrival at the county's Victim Assistance Program came after a multi-year effort. The non-profit Journey Together Service



Photos courtesy of Waukesha County Victim Witness Program

Pepper, a Labrador retriever, is an emotional support dog and has been providing comfort via the Waukesha County District Attorney Office's Victim Assistance Program.

Dog organization, which provides highly trained dogs to disparate agencies, helped bring it to fruition.

During deliberations at the Sept. 17 Judiciary and Law Enforcement Committee, board members on the

panel were overwhelmingly supportive of Pepper's continued service.

"I realize for some people, this might be a new idea," County Supervisor Larry Nelson said. "I've heard nothing but over-



Pepper's official badge.

whelmingly positive comments about Pepper."

From his vantage point, Nelson said he believes Pepper came to the Victim Assistance Program at a crucial time.

"I don't think you could have picked a more stressful year than this last year," Nelson said. "It's really needed."

Nelson added he is pleased Pepper's addition to the program has been seamless.

"I'm just pleased to hear that anyone who's interacted had a good experience," he said. "I know it's a lot of hours of training."

The full County Board was to act on Pepper's continuation via the new grant and donations at its next regular meeting Sept. 28.



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