

MAY/NEWS

MAY 1

Voters to decide millages

TRAVERSE CITY — A pair of “survival” millage requests for public bus service will go before voters in Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties on July 29.

The Bay Area Transportation Authority will ask for a 0.25-mill levy to restore reduced operations after a millage defeat in November. The public transit authority also will seek 0.1-mill to upgrade services included in last year’s failed proposal. Both requests are for five years.

The BATA board approved splitting the ballot issue in hopes that voters will at least return the agency to the operating level before the failed election. Voters in the two-county service district rejected a 5-year, 0.35-mill property tax proposal, which was almost double the 0.18-mill levy approved by voters in 1998. It expires this year.

The measure went down by about 1,350 votes, less than 4 percent of the nearly 38,000 ballots cast.

MAY 1

Poster a ringer for painting

TRAVERSE CITY — National Cherry Festival organizers are red in the face over a cherry-themed watercolor that swept top honors in a commemorative print contest.

But local artist Michele Buday won’t be stripped of her \$450 prize for “Cherries by the Bay,” a painting remarkably similar to another artist’s watercolor crafted for Mackinac Island’s 1994 Lilac Festival.

“To the layperson’s eyes, there are similarities, there’s no question,” said Susan Wilcox Olson, spokeswoman for the National Cherry Festival. “It’s unfortunate it’s so similar.”

Cherry Festival staffers don’t plan to banish the print to some dusty back room. With the eight-day festival set to begin on July 5, Cherries by the Bay already is slathered across hundreds of souvenir

shirts, sweatshirts and \$80 prints, and festival organizers are aiming for a positive spin.

“It may help sales of the Lilac Festival print,” Wilcox Olson said.

Buday’s watercolor features a cherry-laden branch backed by a white fence, bicycle, clouded sky and gleaming bay.

Artist Richard Wolfgang, of Port Austin, recognized the scene as soon as a friend in Traverse City alerted him to Buday’s print.

MAY 2

Most in crowd reject plan

KALKASKA — Most panned, though some applauded, a state proposal to cover the upper Manistee and Pine rivers with the Natural Rivers Act at a hearing here.

Eighty-four people signed in for the fifth of nine hearings in the area on the Department of Natural Resources proposal.

Public comments were weighed against the plan, with objections to setbacks, giving up of local control and a belief that the DNR has already decided it will designate the rivers, regardless what the people say.

DNR officials expected the crowd to be more adamantly opposed than they have been at other hearings, according to Matt Fry, DNR’s administrator of southern rivers. Kalkaska has more river miles than any of the other eight area counties affected by the proposal.

MAY 2

Students to double

TRAVERSE CITY — The Great Lakes Campus under construction at Northwestern Michigan College could turn Traverse City into a “learning destination,” college officials said.

The former industrial site on the shores of West Grand Traverse Bay is being replaced by a stylish new building with soaring views of the water.

“One of our goals is to turn Traverse City into a learning destination,” said NMC President Timothy Nelson. “We want to make Traverse

City a place that people come to learn.”

The building will house the Great Lakes Maritime Academy, the culinary and water studies institutes and a professional development center with a 300-seat conference facility.

The \$18.05 million project has been funded with \$8.1 million from the state, \$7 million from a 1999 voter-approved bond in Grand Traverse County and \$2.95 million from a fundraising campaign. The campaign still has about \$2.3 million to raise.

MAY 3

Honoring contributions

TRAVERSE CITY — The Women’s Resource Center honored volunteers and community partners Thursday during an awards ceremony highlighting the work of the center.

“These awards have a special place in my heart because it takes a lot more than one organization to work on issues like domestic and sexual violence,” program director Jo Bullis said.

Receiving partner awards were: Detective Paul Postal of the Grand Traverse County Sheriff’s Department; attorney James Bearinger; Kalkaska County prosecutor Brian Donnelly; Legal Services of Northern Michigan and Zonta Club II of Traverse City.

MAY 3

Study: Air quality stinks

BEULAH — The American Lung Association has given Benzie County a failing grade for air quality, though a local health official believes the problem is due to pollution that originates elsewhere.

In its annual study, the association looked at 20 counties across the state. Benzie, as well as 16 others, received an “F” for high ozone level days. Ozone is formed when pollutants, most often from industrial sources, react chemically with sunlight.

Benzie County Health Department Director Bill Crawford said Benzie’s high

ozone level has always been a bit of a mystery.

MAY 4

Tax loss may hit coffers

TRAVERSE CITY — A state proposal to end property tax payments made to local governments for land owned by the state Department of Natural Resources could cost local governments millions in annual tax revenue.

County officials in northern Michigan are bristling at the state’s proposal to replace DNR property tax payments with a \$2 per-acre “payment in lieu of taxes” (PILT) reimbursement system that would trim the DNR’s annual state tax bill by more than \$5 million.

In several northern Michigan counties, the DNR ranks among the top property taxpayers. Local officials say changing to a \$2 per-acre PILT system — which is what the state pays on tax-reverted properties and some other public lands — could create a significant funding pinch for local governments.

MAY 5

Agency to unite services

TRAVERSE CITY — In an effort to save money, the Family Independence Agency will consolidate services in Traverse City by July 31 for more than 7,000 Leelanau and Grand Traverse county clients.

Offices on East Duck Lake Road in Lake Leelanau and on Hastings Street in Traverse City will be moved to the state office building at 701 East Elmwood Ave.

Officials say the move would save the agency as much as \$150,000 next year. It will not bring any job or program cuts.

Leelanau County currently handles 1,221 cases in food, cash and medical assistance. Grand Traverse County handles 6,035. These numbers do not include additional adult and children’s services.

MAY 6

Discount cards offered

TRAVERSE CITY — Senior

citizens will receive discounts on prescription drugs under a new plan sponsored by the Grand Traverse County Commission on Aging.

Director Georgia Durga says the commission will offer prescription drug discount cards for eligible Grand Traverse County senior citizens aged 60 and older.

With the help of the Michigan Association of Counties, Durga has brought the drug discount program to Grand Traverse County. For \$15 a year, seniors may buy the discount card, which will be accepted at 19 pharmacies in the county and at another 40,000 drug stores across the nation.

Durga said seniors will save between 10 and 20 percent off the retail price on most generic and brand name prescription drugs. Discounts on certain drugs may be a little less and others could be discounted by as much as 30 percent, she said.

MAY 6

Crystal level protected

LELAND — Groups representing Glen Lake and Crystal River landowners must cooperate to ensure that the maintenance of the lake’s water level doesn’t harm the river, a judge ordered last week.

“The Crystal River is not merely a tool used to maintain Glen Lake’s water level,” Circuit Judge Philip Rodgers wrote.

The ruling ends a chapter in the dispute over the depth of Glen Lake that began in 1945.

For decades, the amount of water that drained through a dam from the lake into the river was a matter of little controversy because lake levels were almost always high.

In 2001, after several years of below-average precipitation, water levels were low and a new dam capable of holding back more lake water from the river was constructed.

MAY 7

Mt. Holiday hit by vandals

ACME — A spate of vandalism at Mt. Holiday Ski Area is

PLEASE SEE PAGE 26