



SPORTS • Despite trophy mishap, Badgers win Duke's Mayo Bowl over Wake Forest/1B
YOUR REGION • Chippewa Falls Christmas Village sees record number of donations/3A

COVID-19 cases decline in EC County

Deaths and hospitalizations also dropping as vaccines are being rolled out across state

By Chris Vetter

LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

Eau Claire — The number of new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are all declining in Eau Claire County, and Public Health Director Lieske Giese is asking for patience as vaccines are slowly rolled out across the state.



Weldeman

"We will get vaccines. It will be slow," Giese said during her weekly press conference Wednesday afternoon. "We will do it as quickly as we can."

The county has now received doses of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, she added. About 47,000 people have been vaccinated statewide, and those numbers are rising daily. Most of those vaccinated so far are health care workers in hospitals or other health-related settings, she said.

"They are working hard to get their teams vaccinated," Giese said.

While vaccines are rolling out, Giese urged people to continue to wear masks and practice social distancing measures.

"2020 has been a memorable year, in many ways," she said.

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Region is welcoming its first female Eagle Scout. Page 3A

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Virus dampens Christmas joy in Bethlehem and elsewhere. Page 9B

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TOMORROW Top 10 local stories for 2020

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STAY HEALTHY

KEEP CALM
and
STOP THE SPREAD

Protect against COVID-19

» FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS

2020 YEAR IN REVIEW: PART FOUR

A trying autumn

COVID-19 cases peaked but plans for life after the pandemic showed surprising returns locally



Staff photo by Dan Belland

John Barstad and Carolyn Gabrielsen Barstad use Eau Claire's drive-thru voting to cast absentee ballots from the comfort of their own vehicle Tuesday at City Hall. They waited nearly an hour to vote but wanted to avoid in-person voting due to COVID-19.

By LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

Eau Claire — The fall saw Wisconsin face the biggest outbreak of the COVID pandemic thus far, with numbers far exceeding anything that had come before. But the news wasn't all bad. Plans began for life after the pandemic and some measures actually showed surprising returns. It all played out with a hotly-contested election taking place.

October

• The Eau Claire school district said it had a \$7.7 million surplus, a result of the truncated 2019-2020 academic year.

• Area COVID numbers continued to rise at area hospitals, setting off some concerns among area health officials.

• The Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce came out in opposition to a controversial health ordinance proposal. Businesses around Eau Claire were hit with fake quarantine placards, an appar-

ent protest against the ordinance. The ordinance was eventually postponed.

• Wisconsin activated an emergency field hospital to help care for rising numbers of COVID patients.

• Solar panels were ready to go at Memorial and North high schools, with an anticipated Dec. 1 switch-on date.

• State data showed liquor store sales were way up compared to 2019. Bar sales, predictably, were down significantly.

• Absentee voting requests were up in

the Chippewa Valley as voters looked to avoid possible crowds at polling places on Election Day.

• Rock Fest unveiled its lineup for the 2021 festival. Most of the acts from the canceled 2020 event were signed up.

• The Pereira family brought a Brazilian specialty to area grocery stores. The bread proved a hit with fans.

• Authorities discovered a woman's body in a suitcase in Chippewa County. The case remains under investigation.

• An early snowstorm hit the region, bringing significant amounts to the Chippewa Valley. Eau Claire officially recorded 8.4 inches, enough to set a new record for the snowiest October.

• Drive-through voting proved popular with Eau Claire residents, another pandemic innovation in a year that saw many such changes.

SEE YEAR PAGE 5A

DHS investigation ongoing at year's end

By RYAN PATTERSON

LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

Eau Claire — The Eau Claire County Sheriff's Office investigation into the Eau Claire County Department of Human Services appears to be at an impasse.

What started seven months ago as an inquiry into DHS financial practices has progressed into a criminal investigation that includes a forensic audit. There is no end in sight to the process, though it could continue if the sheriff's office receives approval from a judge for further investigation.

It is unclear exactly when the inquiry turned into a criminal investigation, but on Dec. 14 Sheriff Ron Cramer said he notified County Administrator Kathryn Schauf, Eau Claire County District Attorney Gary King and Eau Claire County outside counsel Rich White that the sheriff's office has "what we believe to be probable cause of criminal activity" as part of its examination of DHS.

Because the sheriff's office



Staff Photo by Ryan Patterson/

Eau Claire County Board Chair Nick Smiar, right, speaks while County Administrator Kathryn Schauf looks on during the "State of the County" on Jan. 18, 2020. What started seven months ago as an inquiry into DHS financial practices has progressed into a criminal investigation that includes a forensic audit.

suspects wrongdoing, the district attorney's office can bring forth criminal charges if it determines they are warranted. King has declined to comment on the ongoing investigation.

Some details remain hidden, but many aspects related to the investigation are known. An overview of the notable occur-

rences this year helps clarify what led to a closer look at the department that employs more than 200 people and is charged with caring for the county's most vulnerable residents.

2017-19: DHS annual operating losses reach more than seven figures in each of these

three years and total about \$7.5 million. In 2017, losses were \$1.9 million. In 2018, overages equaled \$2.5 million. The deficit was \$3.1 million in 2019. All of those overages were covered by the county's general fund, its de facto savings account. Those DHS numbers were early cause for concern among some county officials regarding the department's financial health.

No one explicitly criticized DHS services, many of which it is legally mandated to provide regardless of cost. DHS programs mainly assist vulnerable and low-income residents and may be more urgent than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Criticism of how DHS handles its finances has occurred, though. Some county supervisors have attributed the significant overages to mismanagement and fiscal negligence, but DHS and county officials maintain that the department is enacting cost-mitigation strategies that take time to show results. They have also mentioned increasing difficulties stemming from poverty, substance abuse and mental health challenges during the past several years.

SEE COUNTY PAGE 2A

Eau Claire ice rinks open today

EAU CLAIRE — Outdoor ice skating rinks at seven Eau Claire parks will be ready for use at 4 p.m. today.

Above-average temperatures earlier this month delayed the usual Dec. 26 opening of the rinks, but a news release from Eau Claire Parks & Recreation said colder weather have now created good conditions for ice skating.

Ice rinks are located at Blvd, Demmer, Oakwood Hills, Pinhurst, Putnam Heights, Roosevelt and Sam Davey parks in Eau Claire.

Warming shelters at the parks will not be open this

winter as a precaution to mitigate the spread of coronavirus.

Lights at the rinks will be on from 4 to 9 p.m. daily.

Only one location — Pinhurst Park — will be supervised this winter, but it is also offering rental of winter equipment. People can check out snowshoes, sleds, hockey sticks and kubb game sets from noon to 7 p.m. through Friday. Then the regular hours for equipment rental will begin, which are 4 to 7 p.m. on weekdays and noon to 5 p.m. during weekends.



People play hockey during January 2020 at the ice rink in Eau Claire's Boyd Park. Staff file photo

Finalists named for city manager

» YEAR
FROM PAGE 1A

- Dale Peters retired as Eau Claire's city manager. Peters had previously delayed his retirement to help the city cope with the pandemic.
- The Chippewa River Water Trail was designated as a national recreational trail.
- Maples mobile home park sold. The troubled park had seen numbers drop significantly due to condemnations.
- The L.E. Phillips Memorial Library started looking to lease a temporary location for use during its renovations.
- Chippewa Falls schools went virtual as the number of new COVID cases accelerated sharply. Deaths also began rising.
- The Eau Claire County Sheriff's Department said it had a surplus.

November

- YMCAs opened learning centers in the area to help students.
- A very close election in Wisconsin saw Joe Biden flip the swing state back to Democrats. Ron Kind, who represents the 3rd Congressional District, survived the strongest challenge of his career.
- Eau Claire County recorded 12 COVID deaths in a single week.
- Statues honoring veterans and their families arrived for display prior to their installation at the Chippewa Valley Veterans Tribute.
- Area nonprofits received grants designed to support them during the pandemic.
- Dunn County officials asked residents to stay home as cases continued to rise.
- Veterans Day celebrations were scaled down.
- Eau Claire County said revenue in 2020 was down, but so was spending.
- Both the Marshfield and Mayo Clinic hospitals in Eau Claire announced they were full, with all staffed beds occupied.
- Menomonie schools went virtual.
- Chippewa County had more than half of its COVID tests come back positive. The 55 percent rate was far in excess of the state's average, even as Wisconsin surged to near the top outbreaks nationally.
- Traffic at the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport was down significantly.
- The University of Wisconsin system went online for classes.
- Bill Bauer continued to brighten people's days with his holiday decorations. It's a tradition he has participated in for seven decades.
- Country Jam announced its 2021 lineup.
- Vaccine trials showed success in protecting against COVID, raising hopes for efforts to end the pandemic.
- Concept art was released for the new Children's Museum.
- Hospitals said they faced a critical situation as COVID numbers continued to spiral upwards.
- Hobbs Ice Center closed



Eau Claire police officers reminded Richard Hovde, a four-year resident of Maples Mobile Home Park in Eau Claire, that the power was being turned off and that he needed to be moved out in October. Staff photos by Dan Reiland/



Registered nurse Madelyn Neumann receives a COVID-19 vaccine shot on Dec. 16 morning from RN Alicia Merten along with four other staff members at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire. Staff photo by Dan Reiland/

to the public due to the pandemic.

- Local theaters received state pandemic grants, offering a much-needed lifeline in 2020.
- Near-perfect weather led to a strong opening to ice season in Wisconsin.
- Eau Claire helped set up a quarantine area in the community's homeless shelter.
- Visit Eau Claire said it would repay excess CVB funds.
- An Eau Claire woman said she was happy to be alive after a freak shooting left her with major injuries.
- Thanksgiving arrived as Wisconsin neared 8,000 new COVID cases per day. Officials feared a holiday COVID surge as families gathered. That didn't wind up happening in the state, though it did in other areas, and numbers began declining again.
- CVTC submitted building plans for its transportation facility, a result of the successful referendum earlier in the year.

December

- The Children's Museum got an offer for their property in downtown Eau Claire. The bid was considerably faster than expected when the property was put on the market.
- Local hospitals began preparing to receive shipments of COVID vaccines, which were widely expected to get approval within weeks.
- Readers responded warmly to the story of Jack, a miniature horse being trained for a possible career as a therapy animal.
- Nestlé announced a \$30 million investment and expansion into its facilities

- in Eau Claire.
- First responders gathered outside hospitals to applaud doctors and nurses at shift changes.
- Investigators released preliminary information that identified the officers and man killed in a November officer-involved shooting.
- Area hospitals said they had fewer patients, but were still well above normal levels. While new COVID cases were falling, many of those sickened in the November surge still needed care.
- Wintertime in the City went ahead as a scaled-down event.
- Nine local sites received grants designed to help music and entertainment venues survive the pandemic.
- Eau Claire sued to force closure of the Regency Inn & Suites hotel, saying it far exceeded other area hotels for the number of criminal complaints, and that efforts to resolve the issues had failed.
- Local officials followed state and federal guidelines in recommending shorter quarantine times for those exposed to COVID.
- Wisconsin Farm Technology Days confirmed it would return to Eau Claire in 2021. It had been scheduled to visit this year, but was one of many events canceled by COVID.
- Dick Hebert, longtime parks director for Chippewa Falls, announced his retirement.
- The Blue Angels, the U.S. Navy's flight demonstration team, confirmed plans for an appearance in the Chippewa Valley in 2022.
- The Hobbs Ice Center stayed closed, but not because of COVID. Nec-

- essary repairs to equipment delayed the planned reopening.
- Ralynn Barnard's request from the Make-A-Wish Foundation was granted, and it was an unusual one. She asked that the foundation help make sure others in the area had a bright Christmas.
- A man died after being stabbed in Eau Claire on Thanksgiving.
- Experts called domestic violence a "shadow epidemic," saying the need for services had increased during the pandemic, along with challenges in providing assistance.
- UW-Eau Claire said it was clearing out a second dorm for COVID quarantine space for the university's spring semester.
- Memorial and North high school band members performed for hospital workers.
- The first shipments of a COVID vaccine arrived in the Chippewa Valley. Health care workers were the first to be vaccinated.
- A Ladysmith couple's Christmas Village offered a walk-through experience in exchange for donations to help local charities.
- The Blue Ox festival announced its 2021 headliners.
- Bruce Barker announced his retirement from CVTC, which means the school will seek a new president in 2021.
- A tiny home village was planned for Chippewa Falls.
- Eau Claire announced the names of finalists for the position of city manager.
- Wisconsin's flagship university system said it would have students back on campus for the spring semester.

Attempted homicide suspect appears in Dunn County Court

By CHRIS VETTER

LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

MENOMONIE — A Menomonie man accused of stabbing another person Nov. 1 appeared in Dunn County Court on Wednesday.

Tasheen Goggins, 42, 136 Main St., is charged with attempted first-degree intentional homicide — use of a dangerous weapon and a count of mayhem.

Goggins, who is incarcerated in the Dunn County Jail, appeared via video along with his attorney, Jonathon Lundeen.

Lundeen requested a lower bond, but Judge Rod Smeltzer rejected that request.

According to the criminal complaint filed in Dunn County Court:

Police were called to Domino's on Broadway Street in Menomonie for a man with a stab wound. They arrived and found bystanders applying pressure to the victim's wound.

Police checked video footage from Domino's and saw Goggins and another person walking outside.

An officer said he can see Goggins grab the victim's jacket while looking around. Then, Goggins thrust his left hand into the victim's abdomen.

The officer said he could see what appeared to be a small knife in Goggins' hand.

At that point, the victim walked into Domino's and Goggins walked out of the camera view.

The following day authorities received a tip Goggins was in a city bar. They found him there and arrested him.

According to medical records obtained by the

district attorney's office, the victim was taken as a trauma patient to Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire. He had a stab wound to the lower right part of the abdomen that pierced through the colon. The victim needed surgery where a part of the colon was removed. There was also a laceration near the kidney.

The victim's wife told authorities her husband had to be intubated and is at risk of septic shock because of stool contamination from the knife wound.

In an interview with authorities, Goggins said he was approached by the victim who started yelling at him and calling him names. He said about a half-block later the victim grabbed him by the shoulder and that is when he stabbed the victim.

Goggins said he wasn't sure where the knife was because he had tossed it in a trash can not far from where the stabbing happened.

Goggins went on to call it a "light stabbing" and that the knife was a small folding knife, roughly four inches long.

Authorities say at no time do they see the victim grab Goggins in the video.

If convicted on both charges, Goggins faces up to 105 years in prison.

On November 3, a \$10,000 cash bond was set for Goggins. On Monday, November 9, the state argued for bond to be increased to \$30,000 but Judge Rod Smeltzer opted to keep bond the same.

Goggins will be back in court for a preliminary hearing on Jan. 6.

Contact: chris.vetter@eccc.com

Chippewa County cases also dropping

» VIRUS

FROM PAGE 1A

"The start of 2021 doesn't flip the switch."

Eau Claire County is now averaging about 39 new COVID-19 cases daily, Giese said.

"The good news is the case number per day is going down," she said, adding the goal is to bring that number to about 10 per day. A lower number allows businesses and schools to remain operational.

"It's much improvement, but we've got work to do to get to our goal," she said.

There are currently 330 active coronavirus cases in the county. An additional 12 people have been hospitalized in the past week, bringing a total to 292 county residents having ever been hospitalized.

In the past week, four more county residents have died from the virus, bringing the total to 75.

"It's a slowing rate, the number of deaths, but

still higher than earlier in the pandemic," she said.

Statewide, about 14,000 more people have been infected in the past week, bringing Wisconsin's total to 477,292. About 4.4%, or 33,000 of those who have tested positive, have ever been hospitalized, resulting in 4,818 deaths statewide.

Giese said the area hospitalization numbers are also flat right now, and she's hopeful that will lead to a similar decline in new deaths.

Giese urged people to avoid gathering for New Year's Eve, in hopes of keeping the daily case numbers at their present rate, or lower.

"We hope that number doesn't creep up," she said.

Chippewa County has seen a similar drop in cases in the past week, with just 149 new cases since Dec. 30, and no new deaths, with the level remaining at 65.

Contact: chris.vetter@eccc.com

More Information

COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin, as of Wednesday.

(Number in parenthesis is the increase in the past day)

Barron.....	4,435 (+27);	5 deaths
57 deaths (+1)	Pierce.....	2,892 (+11)
Buffalo.....	972 (+8);	30 deaths (+1)
7 deaths	Rusk.....	1,098 (+2);
Chippewa.....	5,839 (+25);	13 deaths (+1)
65 deaths	St. Croix.....	5,390 (+18);
Clark.....	2,768 (+18);	27 deaths
51 deaths (+1)	Dunn.....	3,488 (+42);
23 deaths	23 deaths	Trempealeau.....
Eau Claire....	9,182 (+64);	2,949
75 deaths	State.....	477,292 (+2,755)
Jackson.....	2,361 (+11);	Deaths.....
17 deaths	4,818 (+35)	
Pepin.....	670 (+14);	

Source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services