Vol. 135 Number 47 Wednesday, July 17, 2024

McINTOSH Times $1.00

Since 1888

Hub of the Thirteen Townships McIntosh, Minnesota

Hostess Darlene Dierkes and guest Donny Vaa wear the same designer T-shirts from Menards.

July 4th Celebration

Above: Joan Lee and ReMar Voxland enjoy the conversation following the short program on July 4th.

Below: Dianne Roed and grandson, Joe Breckel, share some tasty food and good conversation.

Zebra mussels confirmed in Union Lake in Polk County

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has confirmed the presence of zebra mussels in Union Lake, near Erskine in Polk County; First Silver Lake, near the town of Battle Lake in Otter Tail County; and Heilberger Lake, near Erhard in Otter Tail County.

A lake property owner contacted the DNR after finding a zebra mussel attached to a native mussel in Union Lake. DNR staff found more than 15 zebra mussels near the public water access, which is more than a mile from the location of the initial discovery.

Union Lake has a pump that is used in certain high-water conditions. This pump already has a filter to prevent the dispersal of Eurasian watermilfoil, and it is not currently operating. The DNR will provide direction to the Sand Hill River Watershed District, which operates the pump, to ensure that any future pumping operations are modified to also meet filtration requirements to prevent the spread of zebra mussels downstream.

A First Silver Lake user brought two zebra mussels to a DNR office and provided details on the location where they were found. A DNR invasive species specialist found two zebra mussels on the public water access boat ramp, about three-quarters of a mile from the location of the initial report.

A lake property owner contacted the DNR after finding three zebra mussels attached to a native mussel in Heilberger Lake. A DNR invasive species specialist found five zebra mussels on the public water access boat ramp, about a quarter-mile from the location of the initial report.

While zebra mussels and other invasive species can be introduced to a lake via private docks and accesses, public accesses are typically the first to be surveyed for invasive species.

Whether or not a lake has any invasive species, Minnesota law requires people to:

- Clean watercraft, trailers and equipment to remove aquatic plants and prohibited invasive species.
- Drain all water and leave drain plugs out during transport.
- Dispose of unwanted bait in the trash.

Never release bait, plants or aquarium pets into Minnesota waters.

- Dry docks, lifts and rafts for 21 days before moving them from one water body to another.

These additional steps reduce the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species:

Decontaminate watercraft and equipment – find free stations on the courtesy decontamination page of the DNR website (mndnr.gov/decon).

Spray watercraft and equipment with high-pressure water or rinse with very hot water (120 degrees for at least two minutes or 140 degrees for at least 10 seconds).

Dry watercraft and equipment for at least five days before using in another water body.

People should contact a Minnesota DNR aquatic invasive species specialist (mndnr.gov/invasives/ais/contacts.html) if they think they have found zebra mussels or any other invasive species that was not already known to be in the water body.

More information is available on the aquatic invasive species page of the DNR website (mndnr.gov/ais).

Ellen Burslie at her 96th Birthday celebration with (l-R) great-grandchildren, Holly and Spencer Feyo, grandchildren, Sara and Jason Burslie, and great-grandchildren, Grayson and Gunner Grettem. 3 sets of twins!

Anytime, Anywhere breastfeeding initiative across Polk County

The Polk County Breastfeeding Coalition continues to work on the Anytime, Anywhere Initiative, which aims to raise awareness and acceptance of breastfeeding in any location.

Would you like your business to join the cause? Over 50 Polk County businesses have already signed the pledge, including:

The City of Crookston
Crookston Public Library
Alluma
The Blue Moose Bar & Grill
Bully Brew Coffee - EGF
Mill Street Café
Fair Meadow Nursing Home & Assisted Living
Fertile Community Center
The City of McIntosh
Poplar Meadows Senior Living

The Minnesota Anytime, Anywhere Breastfeeding law states: "A person may breastfeed in any location, public or private, where the parent and child are otherwise authorized to be, irrespective of whether the nipple of the parent's breast is uncovered during or incidental to the breastfeeding." (MN 145.905 LOCATION FOR BREASTFEEDING). Additionally, in the summer of 2023, Minnesota updated their pregnancy and breastfeeding at work laws, requiring employers to provide a designated space for employees to express milk. For more details, visit the Minnesota Department of Health website.

For more information, contact Tammy at (218) 281-3385.

Over 70 people were in attendance at the Dan and Darlene Dierkes farm for for the annual reading of the Declaration of Independence by Ben Ramse. After the reading there was much visiting and sharing of snacks.

The family of Ellen Burslie gathered over the July 4th weekend to celebrate her 96th birthday at the Mary and Dan Schow farm, hosted by her children. Over 50 people attended the big day. Ellen turned 96 on June 15th.

Ellen Burslie turned 96 years old on June 15th! She raised her family in the McIntosh area and has been a big part of the community over the years. She currently lives at McIntosh Senior Living. Her kids hosted a birthday party with over 50 family members attending over the 4th of July weekend.

Stopping hunger together

The number of Minnesotans getting help from food shelves is at a record high, according to Hunger Solutions Minnesota. In 2022 Polk County saw a 68% increase in the number of children receiving food from food shelves and a 73% increase for adults. Last year that trend continued with 7.5 million food shelf visits across Minnesota–another 32% increase. We are seeing that same trend here in Erskine at Grace Community Food Shelf (GCFS). As fast as the food comes in, it goes back out again.

"The beauty of living in a small community is how we pitch in and help each other." I heard that comment when I moved here from Minneapolis a few years ago. I have seen that happen over and over again. People band together to support each other. If you would like to help curb hunger in our community here are some ways you can help.

Volunteer at Grace Community Food Shelf

- Participate in a community food drive.
- Donate money to GCFS.
- Help spread the word that food assistance is available.

Donations generally allow food shelves to get the most food for their dollar. Grace Community Food Shelf purchases food from North Country Food Bank at a significant discount, which

can stretch each dollar given. July is a great month to donate as GCFS is participating in a match program through Hunger Solutions. Hunger Solution's Open Your Heart Summer Challenge is aimed at helping to raise more funds in our community with the opportunity to receive a proportionally matched grant from Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless. Please consider a donation this month to Grace Community Food Shelf.

Serving Erskine and the surrounding areas, Grace Community Food Shelf is open each month:

- Second Thursday 2 PM to 6 PM
- Third Thursday 10 AM to 1 PM

Third Saturday 9 AM to Noon

Located behind Grace Lutheran Church in the garage next to church. at 332 Vance Ave S, Erskine, MN 56535. For more information call (218) 687-2250.

Grace Community Food Shelf

Behind Grace Lutheran Church in Erskine.

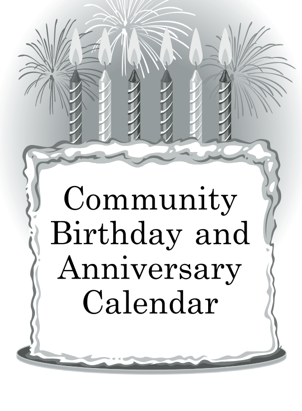
Open for shopping in July

Thursday, July 18th from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm.

Saturday, July 20th from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm.

Contact information:. foodshelf@gracechurcherskine.org or call 218-687-2250 leave a message.

The winner of the 4th of July Drawing from Neil's Meats & The Hen House is Marilyn Branstner of Erskine...husband Dale was here to receive it for her. Congratulations.



Wed. July 17: Marvie Johnson, Nick Olson, *Nathan & Stephanie Frisk

Thurs. July 18: Larry Finseth, *Bret & Jill Schulz

Fri. July 19: Justin Shultz, Joshua Andres

Sat. July 20: Darlene Solie

Sun, July 21: Patrick Rolf, Lukas Lindseth, *Sam & Amber Finseth

Mon. July 22: Madchen (Mae) Knowles, Peyson Thode

Tues. July 23: Charlie Carlson, Nicolai Sveen, Brady Langemo, Mary Kroening, Shannon Svalen, *Garrett & Megan Rock

Ellen Burslie (seated, right) recently celebrated her birthday with all her children and lots of family. Pictured with Ellen is her son, Craig (seated) along with (l-r) Nancy, Karen, Mary and Blake.

McINTOSH Times

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"Serving the Win-E-Mac area"

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CHURCH DIRECTORY

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
Fosston
Fr. John Suvakeen, Pastor

Wed. July 17: 11:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston
Fri. July 19: 11:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston
Sun. July 21: 8:00am Confession; 8:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston; 10:30am Mass at St. Joseph's, Bagley; 3:00pm Divine merch Sunday, St. Mary's, Fosston
Wed. July 24: 11:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston
Fri. July 26: 11:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston
Sun. July 28: 8:00am Confession; 8:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston; 10:30am Mass at St. Joseph's, Bagley; 3:00pm Divine merch Sunday, St. Mary's, Fosston
Wed. July 31: 11:30am Mass at St. Mary's, Fosston

OURS SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH (ELCA)
McIntosh
Pastor Rene Mehlberg
Synodical Authorized Minister Katie DeMarais

Sun. July 21: 10:00am Coffee Hour; 10:30am Worship Services
Su. July 28: 10:00am Coffee Hour; 10:30am Worship Services
Our Savior's Lutheran Church, McIntosh will run church services on Channel 30 on Garden Valley Channel 30. They will also be available on YouTube on channel One in Spirit - The Journey. Our Saviors service will be available by 8:30 am each Sunday until further notice.

MCINTOSH AFLC
McIntosh Trinity / Mount Carmel:
Pastor:
Jerry Moan

Trinity: (27262 315th St. SE, McIntosh) Sunday Worship: 9:30am
Mt. Carmel: (305 State St. NE, McIntosh) Sunday Worship: 11:00am
Lutheran Parish YouTube Channel

GOSEN LUTHERAN CHURCH
Independent
Gary Johnson, Pastor
www.gosen-church.com
Face Book: Gosen Church

Sun, July 21: 9:30am Sunday School and Adult Bible Study; 11:00am Worship Service (also on Facebook and gosenchurch.com)
Tues, July 23: 10:00am. Sunday worship service telecast on GVTV--30
Wed, July 24: 6:30pm Bible Study at Sharon Ramberg's home
Gosen Church is located 4 miles south of the junctions of Highways 2 & 59 or 4 miles north of Winger; then 1/2 mile east on County Road 206. For information call 268-4242 or 687-3461.

VERNES LUTHERAN CHURCH (LCMC)
McIntosh
PastorLee Laaveg

Sun. July 21: 9:00am Worship
Sun. July 28: 9:00am Worship

IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH
McIntosh
Pastor Bruce Blocker

Sundays: 9:00am Worship; 10:00am Fellowship Hour; 10:15am Sunday School

CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH
Winger

Sundays: 10:30am Coffee Fellowship; 11:00am Worship

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH- NALC
Erskine
Rev. Pam Thorson

Sundays: 9:15am Sunday School; 10:30am Worship
Come early and enjoy fellowship and a good cup of coffee. It will also be available at the same time on Garden Valley Channel 30, Facebook and YouTube.

THRIVING LIFE CHURCH
Erskine, MN

Sunday servie at 10:00 am
Call or visit us at: 22722 350th Street; 218-687-2343

Please contact the McIntosh Times if you move or have a change in your address so we can keep the paper coming to your home on time.

THE WINGER
ENTERPRISE

Wednesday, July 17, 2024

Field Notes talks disease and weed management in a wet year

After the rainiest April through June period recorded at many

Minnesota weather stations, corn and soybean growers are facing increased weed and disease management challenges. Assessing both crop health and weed control practices is more important than ever.

Dr. Alison Robertson, field pathologist at Iowa State University, tells growers to "get out of the truck and into the fields to see what diseases are present." Armed with that information, growers can match varieties and hybrids with the disease resistance traits.

What might growers see this year? Excessive moisture and flooding favors different pathogens, like Pythium that causes damping off and Phytophthora root rot in soybean. While there are no rescue treatment options for either of these diseases, soybean varieties with resistance to Phytophthora are available.

Other soybean diseases, such as white mold and sudden death syndrome, are also favored by wet weather, but conditions will have to be right through July and early August for these diseases to develop. For those hoping that flooding would drown out the soybean cyst nematode, unfortunately, the nematode can survive flooded conditions for several months; however, where soybean planting was delayed, the number of SCN generations will likely be reduced, so the overall population increase may be less.

In corn, wet conditions favor less common diseases like Crazy top and Physoderma, diseases that rarely cause yield reductions. However, heavy rains and hail can increase the incidence of Goss's wilt, a disease that can be economically important.

Every time a disease is present, inoculum that survives in soil or on residue builds. If the environment is right and a susceptible host is present, the risk for disease increases.

Some foliar diseases, such as frogeye leaf spot in soybean and tar spot in corn, can be managed with fungicides, unlike the corn and soybean diseases mentioned above. However, the potential for a positive return on investment (ROI) is complicated by the conditions this year. Late planting, potential fertilizer nutrient loss, and other factors impact yield potential, which in turn affects the ROI. Fungicides can protect the crop from disease, but they cannot overcome other issues.

Dr. Tom Peters, Extension weed scientist at University of Minnesota Extension, has been waiting 35 years for the perfect growing season. "2024 is not it," he states. "Weeds are bigger than they should be, postemergence herbicides are not working as well primarily because of cool and wet conditions, and there are drowned-out areas in fields to deal with."

Weed characteristics demand respect this year. Wet conditions with cooler temperatures have extended weed germination and emergence periods. Early season weeds like kochia, common lambsquarters and ragweed, that should be done emerging, are still germinating.

Other weeds that are usually less common in our area are more widespread in 2024 and are thriving in the wet, cool conditions. For example, nightshade, smartweed, barnyardgrass, yellow nutsedge and even bur cucumber have taken advantage of prolonged cool and wet conditions.

Postemergence herbicides have not been performing as well this year. During 2023, Peters received frequent calls about weeds not dying. Weeds had developed thicker cuticles during the drought which reduced herbicide uptake. During 2024, herbicide uptake has been reduced because weeds are not actively growing.

There have also been limited opportunities to apply herbicides in a timely manner, so weeds are larger. Peters suggests adding tank mix partners – depending on herbicide traits - with the primary herbicide to get better uptake and control. However, like weeds, crops are not growing so we need to be careful with crop injury since crops are not metabolizing herbicides as efficiently and mixtures might cause more injury symptoms than in other years.

Soil residual herbicides may offer additional control options. Group 15 (chloroacetamide) herbicides are still in play, particularly if waterhemp is an issue. However, be careful with the triazines and other products applied late in the season due to carryover concerns. Be sure to follow rotation restrictions and all label instructions.

Weed management in drowned-out areas is critical. If these areas are ignored, weeds will produce seed and the weed control clock will be reset requiring another four to six years to get the seed bank under control.

For more information from University of Minnesota Extension, visit extension.umn.edu/crop-production.

Thanks to the Soybean Research and Promotion Council and the Corn Research and Promotion Council for their generous support of this program.

Story to Share?
If you have a story or photos you want to share,
please send to:
mcintoshtimes@gmail.com

Christopher Burslie and his wife were visiting from South Korea. He is the son of Craig Burslie and the grandson of Ellen Burslie. They had come to help her celebrate her 96th birthday!

Pastor Jerry Moan and wife Rebecca had just moved back to the area last week. Jerry is the new pastor at Trinity and Mt. Carmel churches, and graduated from McIntosh-Winger High School in 1979.

Ruffed grouse counts highest since 1972

Minnesota's ruffed grouse spring population counts are similar to last year and to other recent peaks in the 10-year population cycle of grouse — a pattern recorded for 73 years.

The Minnesota DNR and its partners use spring drumming counts to help monitor the ruffed grouse breeding population through time.

What's drumming? Check out this grouse drumming video from Ruffed Grouse Society for the sights and sounds.

The recent grouse population trend includes a low point in the cycle in 2021 that was not as low as previous lows, followed by the highest peak this year since 1972.

Warm temperatures and dry conditions that favor high nest success and chick survival

the last few years may partly explain the quicker than expected rise to peak levels in the 10-year cycle. Snow conditions also were favorable for roosting throughout much of the core of grouse range during the winters 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, followed by an unusually warm winter during 2023-2024. Minnesota's climate is getting warmer and wetter with more heavy, intense rainfalls occurring.

As a reminder, for hunting, drumming counts are not an accurate way to predict the birds that will be present during the fall.

Nesting success and chick survival during the spring and summer are among the factors that influence the number of birds present in the fall. These factors can be reduced by heavy rain during June when nests are hatching and chicks are young.

Thank you to our 13 cooperating organizations that provide help to count grouse drumming, including federal and tribal partners. The ruffed grouse survey report can be found on the DNR website.

Curt and Judy Bartz visit with Jan Langemo and Clellie Kiecker on the 4th of July in rural McIntosh.

Youth Fishing Day is July 20th at Rydell

Rydell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Friends of Rydell and Glacial Ridge Refuges Association will be hosting their 7th Annual Youth Fishing Day at Rydell NWR on Saturday, July 20th, from 9:00am - 1:00pm. This free event is targeted towards youth age 15 or younger. Anglers age 16 and older must possess a valid Minnesota DNR fishing license to fish on the Refuge. A limited amount of fishing tackle (rods and reels) will be available, or youth anglers are welcome to bring their own. Bait will be provided, free of charge. The fish won't be the only ones eating for free – lunch will be provided for all participants.

The event will also include a fish cleaning demonstration and a casting contest. Certificates will be given to participants who catch their first fish, as well as for the biggest fish of each species, and winners of the casting contest. Other surprise prizes will be awarded to participants as well!

Fishing within Rydell NWR

is only allowed from three piers located on the west end of Tamarac Lake. Special vehicle access will be provided during this event to what is normally a hike in/bike-in only fishing area. So far this summer, the bluegills and large-mouth bass have been plentiful on Tamarac Lake. During the event, you're welcome to keep what you catch – we'll clean them for you – or practice catch and release.

Participants will be checked-in and given more detailed event information when they arrive at the main (east) Rydell entrance Saturday morning. Youth can stay for the entire 4-hour event, or just a portion of it. Rydell NWR is located 3 miles south of Highway 2, between Mentor and Erskine, at 17788 349th St SE.

For more information, please contact Gregg Knutsen, Refuge Manager, at 218-686-4329 / gregg_knutsen@fws.gov.

Ben Ramse and Bud Kiecker were enjoying a bite to eat while solving the world's problems during the 4th of July event at the Dierkes farm.

Home of the Patriots
WEM School Announcements

Win-E-Mac is excited to offer an arts opportunity this summer for students going into third through ninth grades. "Summer Arts Stages," a group out of East Grand Forks, will be in residence from Monday, July 29th through Friday, August 2nd to direct Disney's The Aristocats KIDS! Rehearsals will be from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm every day that week. The performance will be at 7pm on Friday, August 2nd.

If your child is interested in participating, please visit the Win-E-Mac school website at www.wemschools.org.

If you have any questions (or if you might be interested in crew rather than cast), please email Andrew Hanson at ahanson@wemschools.org.

Win-E-Mac School will be holding its yearly Parent/Student Activities Registration meeting on Tuesday, July 30 at 7:00pm in the main commons for students entering 7th-12th grade in the 2024-2025 school year.

Students participating in ANY activity/sport for the upcoming school year should attend. Additionally, any students looking to participate in a fall sport will have a short meeting with their coaches following the parent meeting. For any questions, please contact Activities Director Brady Langemo blangemo@win-e-mac.k12.mn.us

Win-E-Mac School Readiness and Head Start Early Childhood/Preschool Screening will be Thursday August 8, 2024.

Preschool/Early Childhood Screening is a free and simple check of how your child is growing, developing, and learning.

A trained professional will check: • Vision and hearing • Height and weight • Immunizations (shots) • Large and small muscles • Thinking, language and communication skills • Social and emotional development

Preschool/Early Childhood Screening is open to all children, ages three years old and up, who have not been screened. Children must be screened before entering preschool and kindergarten.

Screening will take place at the Polk County Public Health (Bjella Building) in McIntosh.

Contact Heather Earls at Win-E-Mac to set up an appointment time for your child to be screened. hearls@wemschools.org.

The Fitness Center access has now been changed to summer hours. (The Fitness Center is closed during the school day during the school year.) You are now able to get into the fitness center 24/7. If you have any questions, please call Kristi at the school.

The Northwest Minnesota Labor Market Is Driven by Long-Term Trends...Again

By Anthony Schaffhauser

With employment now gaining ground – total employment has surpassed its prior high of 2019 both in Northwest Minnesota and in Minnesota statewide – it is natural to think of this as a new era. With that frame of mind, we assess the state of the Northwest Minnesota labor market from the long-term trend perspective.

Employment is back on trend

Employment in Northwest recovered from the Pandemic Recession by 2023 (Figure 1). This was a much faster recovery than after the Great Recession. Northwest Minnesota's annual employment was at its Great Recession low in 2007 at 207,548 jobs, and it took until 2014 to surpass the prior annual employment high of 213,888. So, while the economic expansion after the Great Recession was the longest in history, the labor market only started gaining ground about halfway through it.

In contrast, at just two months long the Pandemic Recession was the shortest in history and was followed by a historically tight labor market with a record number of job vacancies and record low unemployment. In 2022, there were an estimated 2.5 vacancies for every job seeker in Northwest. So, even if every job seeker had been an immediate fit for an open job, 60% of jobs would still have gone unfilled. Clearly employment would have recovered even faster if there had been enough workers for all the open positions.

The Northwest has 1,631 more jobs in 2023 than in 2019, which is 0.73% growth. Remarkably, 0.73% happens to be the annualized job growth rate from 2013 to 2019. Job growth appears to have picked right back up where it left off. The 2023 employment recovery matches the growth trend from right about when the labor market recovered from the Great Recession up until the pandemic. Does this mean everything is back to normal?

While overall employment is back, employment for some industry sectors is drastically different. From 2015 to 2019, ten of the 20 industry sectors had significantly above average growth: Agriculture, Construction, Manufacturing, Finance & Insurance, Professional & Technical, Educational Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, Accommodation & Food Services, Other Services and Public Administration. Of these ten, only Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Other Services, have continued 2015 to 2019 growth with similar growth from 2019 to 2023. The other seven had their trend altered by the pandemic **roducing industries fared best**

The goods-producing industry sectors (Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting, Mining, Construction and Manufacturing) generally fared better through the Pandemic Recession than the rest, which are services-producing sectors.1 In fact, employment in the entire goods-producing domain grew 3.5% in the four years prior to the pandemic, then had faster 5.5% growth since 2019. Goods producing sectors also have above average paychecks, adding wealth to the Northwest region. In contrast, employment for all services sector combined grew 2.2% from 2015 to 2019 and declined 0.5% from 2019 to 2023.

Agriculture has been on a mostly non-stop employment growth trend since the early 2000s. Employment declined slightly in 2021, but 2022 exceeded 2019, and growth continued for 2023. Manufacturing is the second largest employing industry sector in the region and the largest of the goods-producing sectors, so its 3% growth from 2015 to 2019 provided the largest job gains. Manufacturing declined in 2020 but resumed job growth in 2021 and employment was above 2019 levels by 2022. Manufacturing is nearing its job count from back in 2004, at 30,304 jobs, but productivity increases have limited the need for greater numbers of workers.

Construction had declined from its 2004 peak of 11,943 jobs to 9,688 in 2011. Growth ensued from there through 2019, but nothing like the surge during the pandemic. In 2021, Construction reached a new peak of 13,474 jobs. Although it took a breather in 2022, dropping to 12,514 jobs, it grew 3.7% from 2022 to 2023. This construction boom also stabilized Mining employment, which had been declining. Mining in the Northwest mainly supplies sand and gravel for construction. The pandemic recovery substantially strengthened Construction's prior growth trend.

Some services sectors started new uptrends, some continued previous uptrends, and some slowed previous downtrends

Like Construction, Wholesale Trade exited the Pandemic Recession with a strong employment uptrend. However, it had been trending down from its prior peak of 11,491 jobs in 2014. Employment dropped to 10,977 in 2020, and it started an uptrend in 2021. Wholesale Trade is the pandemic recovery star of the services-providing domain, adding the most jobs and having the second fastest growth behind Arts, Entertainment & Recreation. With the highest average weekly wages of any services sector with an employment growth trend, Wholesale Trade is a driver of the region's prosperity.

Like Wholesale Trade, Retail Trade and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation made a turnaround from employment decline to growth in the pandemic recovery. Real Estate & Rental & Leasing and Other Services are the other two services sectors with growth, but rather than making a turnaround, both are continuing their prior uptrend.

Finally, the following four industries had their pre-pandemic downtrends moderate in the pandemic recovery: Utilities, Transportation & Warehousing, Information and Administrative Support & Waste Management. Only one sector, Management of Companies, was in a downtrend that continued unaltered by the pandemic.

Some industries are recovering more slowly or may not trend back

Educational Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, Accommodation & Food Services and Public Administration are four of the region's five largest services industries. Retail Trade is the fifth largest employing industry. You can read the assessment of these industries in December 2023, which remains relevant and true.

Health Care & Social Assistance peaked in 2018 and has yet to reestablish a growth trend in Northwest, declining in 2022 and remaining below 2021 levels in 2023. Statewide, Health Care continued growing from 2018 to 2019, and in 2023 it exceeded 2019 levels. The Nursing & Residential Care Facilities subsector has a larger share of employment in the Northwest, so challenges recruiting and retaining employees in this subsector is holding back employment. Thus, health care worker demand is intact, but is in large part unfilled. However, in 2023, Nursing & Residential Care employment had its first employment gain since 2018, perhaps signaling the start of a much-needed turnaround.

Educational Services and Accommodation & Food Services are on track to regain their pre-pandemic employment uptrends in the near future. Both increased employment every year since 2020, putting Educational Services just 1.1% below pre-pandemic employment while Accommodation & Food Services is within 0.5%.

The remaining three service sectors were in pre-pandemic uptrends but show little to no employment recovery: Finance & Insurance, Professional & Technical Services and Public Administration. Public Administration had anemic growth since 2021 and is the furthest behind 2019 job counts of any sector. Not only does this reverse the above-average growth trend prior to the pandemic, it is also unique to the region. Statewide, job counts are now slightly above 2019.

Both Finance & Insurance and Professional & Technical Services are down from 2021, but those industries "had some of the fastest wage growth since the pandemic, even while employment was declining." This implies that technology is allowing professionals in these two industries to be more productive while relying on fewer lower-paid support staff.

Pandemic impacts are fading, but long-term demographic trends are keeping tension on the labor market

Northwest Minnesota saw a record low 2.0% unemployment rate in September and October 2022, signaling the tightest labor market since the data became available on a regional basis in 1990. This record was tied the following year in October 2023. In March 2024, the unemployment rate was 4.2%, way down compared to 5.8% in March 2019. The acute impacts of the pandemic are largely behind us. There are some chronic impacts such as increased retirements and people with long COVID symptoms not able to work or working fewer hours. However, there is no sign these impacts are increasing, and Northwest's labor force has been growing.

The Northwest had an average of 303,284 workers in 2019 but grew to an average of 308,191 by 2023, increasing by 4,907 workers, or 1.6%. In comparison to the data, total jobs increased 0.7% from 2019 to 2023. So, we would expect the labor market to have loosened with the additional workers.2 However, the long-term demographic trends, namely the retiring Baby Boomers, are keeping Northwest's labor market remarkably tight. Note that retirees do not supply labor, but still demand goods and services.

Figure 2 shows the labor force growth trend and how the retiring Baby Boomers impact it. Note that to use the most recent data, the years in the figure are the 12 months ending with March of the named year. So, 2024 is actually representing April 2023 through March 2024. Drawing a best-fit trendline from 1991 to 2002 and extending this line forward in time shows how the labor force growth trend changes around 2002, primarily due to the impact of the Baby Boom generation. The trendline continues to rise above the labor force line below. Drawing another best-fit trendline from 2002 to 2024 and extending it backward in time illustrates the trend change from the other end.

This trend change can also be expressed numerically. The annualized growth rate of the labor force from 1991 to 2002 was 1.8% per year. From 2002 to 2024 the annualized growth is 0.4%, meaning labor force growth was 4.5 times faster from 1991 to 2002 than in the past 20 years.

The trend change reflects the experience of the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, aging out of the prime working years of age 25 to 54. The oldest Baby Boomers started turning age 55 in 2001. Back in 2000, the labor force participation rate (LFPR) for people aged 25 to 54 was 86.3%, while it dropped to 69.6% for people aged 55 to 59 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census SF3, Table PCT035).

Moving forward in time by 15 years, the Baby Boomers continue to age and their LFPR continued to drop, down to 68.8% for people aged 55 to 64 and 24% for people aged 65 to 74 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 ACS 5-year estimates). For age 75 years and over, which the Baby Boomers started reaching in 2021, the LFPR drops to 6.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-year estimates).

What's more, the generations after the Baby Boomers are not replacing them. Generation X (formerly referred to as the Baby Bust) is not large enough; the Northwest has about a third more Baby Boomers than Gen Xers. Also, many Millennials moved away when they were in their 20s. There were 75,812 people aged 15 to 24 in 2000, but ten years later there were only 61,193 people aged 25 to 34 in 2010, representing a significant loss of people over a 10-year period. (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates)

These demographic trends were masked by the Great Recession and only started to surface again in 2018 when the annual unemployment rate hit a then record low of 4.3% (Figure 2). More record low unemployment rates followed the pandemic. While it seems like the pandemic was the singular cause, the trends that led to the tight labor market started over two decades ago and continue today. The 2024 unemployment rate remains remarkably low at 3.3%, and the long-term unemployment rate downtrend is clearly shown in Figure 2.

That said, the national unemployment rate is higher for January through March 2024 than these same months in 2023. While this unemployment rate increase is not yet as noticeable in Minnesota nor the Northwest, we may be in store for some labor market loosening. However, we have five more years until the youngest Baby Boomers reach age 65, so we are predisposed to having a tight labor market for the foreseeable future.

Job vacancies are now off their peak but still indicate hiring demand, particularly in certain industries

Normalization of job vacancies is the clearest sign that the historic labor market tightness is easing. While the over 30% drop in Northwest job vacancies seems drastic, the number of job vacancies in 2023 is almost exactly at the 2018 pre-pandemic peak. Statewide it has eased back slightly below the pre-pandemic peak. Of course, the labor market prior to the pandemic was historically tight relative to the prior two decades.

Like with the industry employment trends above, the job vacancy changes in 2023 are far from uniform. Five of the 20 industry sectors had increased job vacancies compared to 2022, despite the overall drop. Construction and Utilities had rapid increases, indicating strong hiring demand. Arts, Entertainment & Recreation and Public Administration job vacancies also increased significantly, while Finance & Insurance saw little change.

Besides Construction, vacancies dropped off in the goods-producing domain. However, wage offers for the vacancies remain well above average. Goods-producing industries also had below average job vacancy rates. Job vacancy rates are the number of vacancies relative to the number of people currently employed. They measure the magnitude of hiring demand relative to the size of the industry, and high rates can indicate more intense staffing needs.

The industries looking to staff up are those with above average job vacancy rates and increases in job vacancies, or below average decreases in job vacancies in the current situation where vacancies declined 30.5% overall. This includes Accommodation & Food Services, Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, and Health Care & Social Assistance. The industry employment data backs this up as the number of jobs from 2022 to 2023 increased 3.0%, 5.2%, and 2.2%, respectively in these industries. Management of Companies is an anomaly with declining employment and declining job vacancies, yet the highest job vacancy rate.

The tight labor market brings wage growth, particularly for the Northwest

Increased wages are one of the most significant changes triggered by the tightening labor market. Wages in Minnesota and the U.S. were little changed from first quarter 2003 to first quarter 2014 (see Figure 1 for Minnesota and The FRED Blog (2/8/2018), "What's Real about Wages?" for U.S. data.) In contrast, Northwest Minnesota wages increased 4.6% over this time, but were $19.10 in first quarter 2018, compared to $22.32 for Minnesota (in inflation-adjusted first quarter 2023 dollars). That was less than 86% of the statewide wage.

Recall that in 2018, the unemployment rate in Northwest set a new record low of 4.3%, beating the prior record of 4.4% in 1999 (Figure 2). That's when the tightening labor market went to work on wages. From first quarter 2018 to 2023, cumulative real (inflation-adjusted) wage growth was 16.6% in the Northwest and 12.7% in Minnesota. Compare that five-year increase to the eleven-year increase of 4.6% for the Northwest, and a -1.0% decrease for Minnesota from first quarter 2003 to first quarter 2014. Note that the 2021 peak in wages reflects many lower-wage workers being unemployed while wages were paid to higher paid workers who remained employed. The tight labor market brought on a substantial increase to workers' purchasing power throughout the state. What's more, the increase brought Northwest wages to nearly 90% of the statewide wage.

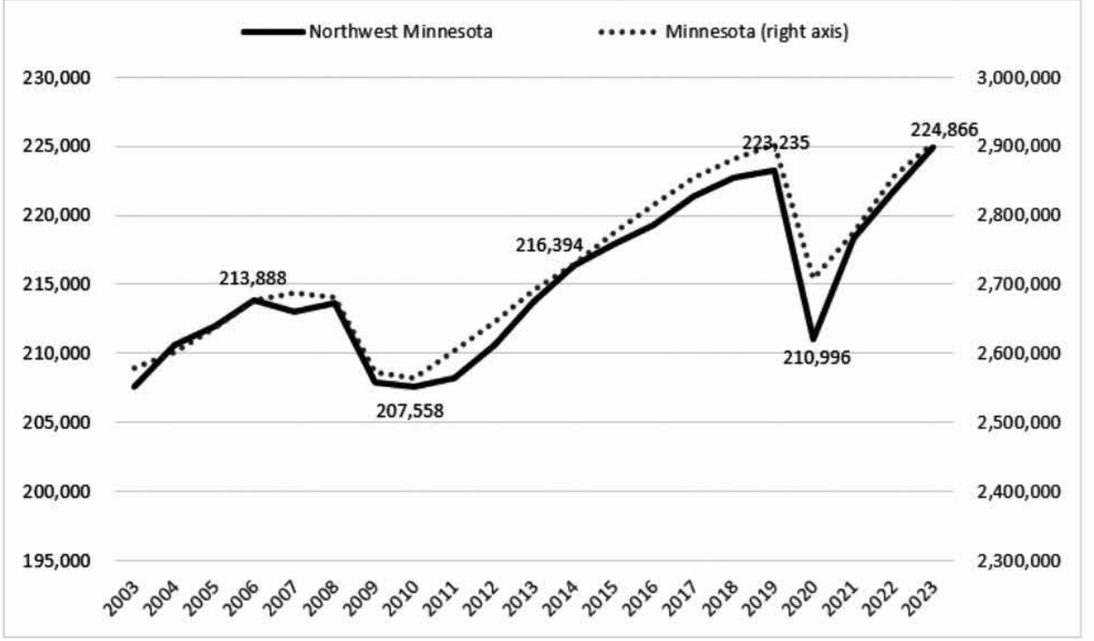
Summary and Conclusions

The takeaway from this assessment of the state of Northwest Minnesota's labor market is how dissimilar the pandemic recovery has been compared to the labor market situation of the last three decades. During the past four years, we have set record lows for the unemployment rate and record highs for job vacancies. These short-term pandemic recovery driven changes brought the longstanding demographic-driven workforce challenges to the forefront. However, the changes also rapidly boosted real wages which had already begun increasing. While there are recent signs of loosening, the labor market remains tight compared to the 30 years prior to 2021. With the more extreme conditions of the pandemic recovery behind us, we can start to see more lasting trends emerge.

Besides the speed, a key difference of the Pandemic Recession recovery from the Great Recession recovery is that employers' ability to recruit and retain workers became nearly as important to growth as the demand for the goods and services that the business produces. This creates a huge incentive to increase productivity, and advancements in automation, information technology and artificial intelligence are promising in this regard.

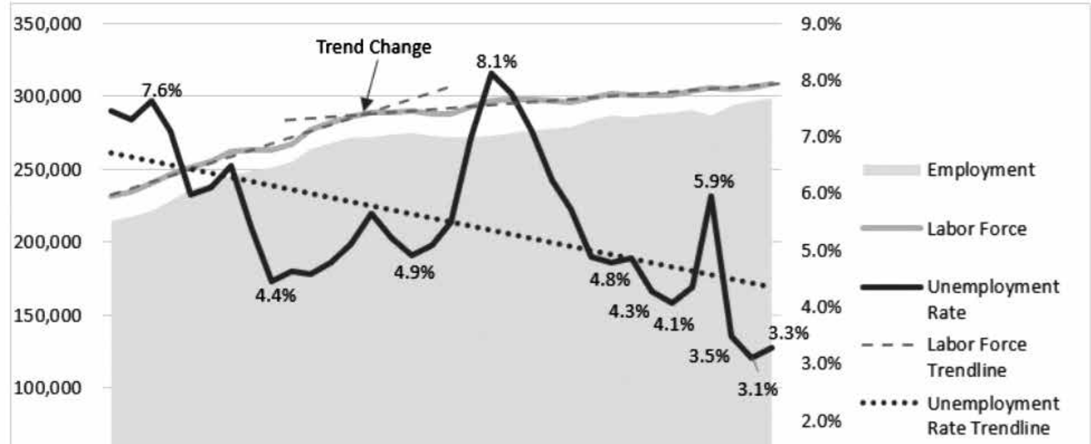
Some industries or some occupations within industries will experience staff decreases due to technology advancements. Others will be able to raise wages to recruit the needed workers due to worker productivity gains that make higher wages feasible. As long as businesses can figure out how to produce enough goods and services to meet demand, a new long-term trend of low unemployment and rising real wages is great for the region.

Figure 1: Employment in the Northwest Minnesota Region and Minnesota Statewide, 2003 to 2023



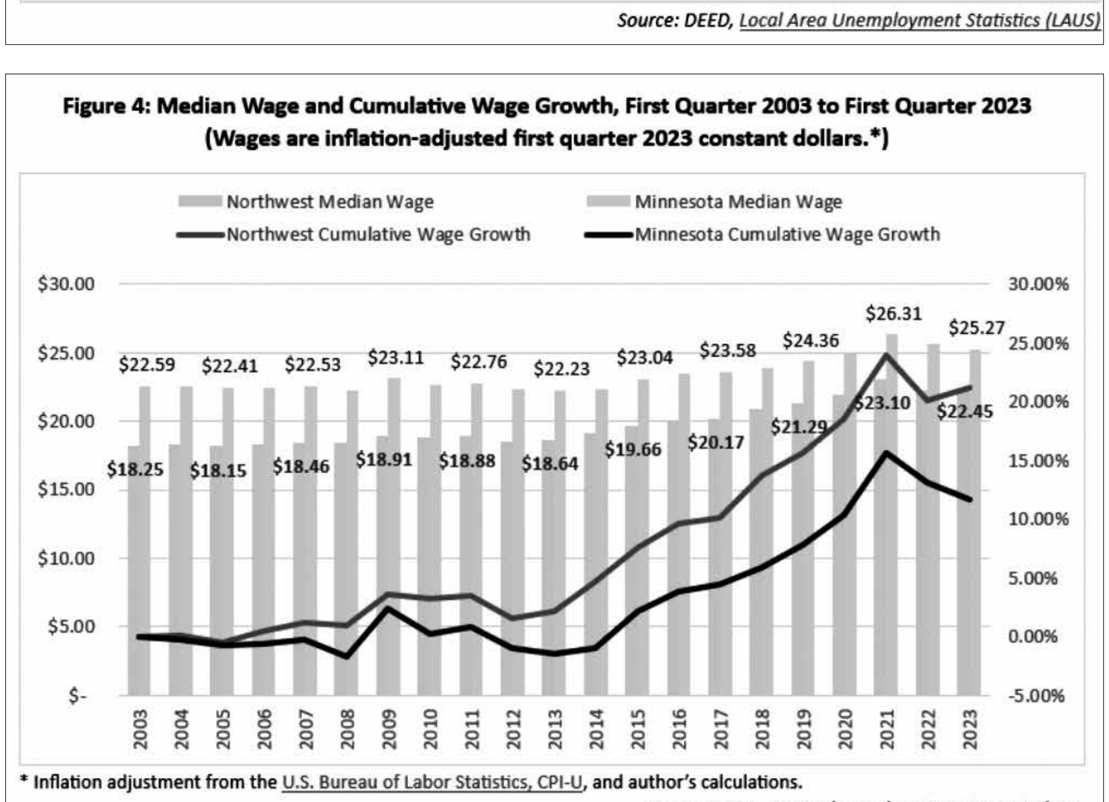
Source: DEED, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Figure 2: Northwest Minnesota Labor Force, Employment, Unemployment Rate and Trendlines, 1991 to 2024 (years are 12 months ending in March)



Source: DEED, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

Figure 4: Median Wage and Cumulative Wage Growth, First Quarter 2003 to First Quarter 2023 (Wages are inflation-adjusted first quarter 2023 constant dollars.*)



* Inflation adjustment from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI-U, and author's calculations.

Source: DEED, Quarterly Employment Demographics