

May, 2019

Volume 13, Issue 2

Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

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- Gem Lake Villas Update
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- Scholarships Awarded

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- May 8
- May 22
- June 5
- June 19
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Gem Lake Responds to Water Gremlin Issue

By Len Cacioppo, City Council Member

Water Gremlin is a manufacturing company headquartered in White Bear Township very near the northern edge of Gem Lake. They make fishing sinkers and battery terminal posts and have been in business since 1949. They have been very much in the news lately. This is a summary of what happened and how it potentially affects residents of Gem Lake.

What happened

In the summer of 2018, Water Gremlin (WG) informed the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) that they were not operating within the limits of their permitted air emissions rates of Trichloroethylene (TCE). Between the time the MPCA was notified and January of 2019, WG conducted an internal investigation to determine both how much and for how long they were exceeding their permitted emission levels. Contributing to the length of the inquiry was the nature of the records being researched. **(continued on page 2)**



Scholarships Awarded to Three Gem Lake Seniors

Three Gem Lake residents who are high school seniors have been awarded \$1,000 through the Gem Lake Scholarship Program. The award was made after review of applications at the Gem Lake City Council Meeting on April 16. The recipients are Emily Marier, Makena Pratt and Isaac Tessier.

The Gem Lake Scholarship Program was started in 2010 to provide funds to graduation high school seniors for their post-secondary education. In its nine-year existence, the program has awarded \$500-1000 to a variety of students, and in a couple of years, multiple candidates received the award. The funds can be used for any type of post-secondary education, such as college or technical school. This year's deadline was April 1. Applicants must be in their senior year of high school and must be residents of Gem Lake.

Emily Marier is graduating from White Bear Lake High School and plans to pursue a career in elementary education beginning at Century College **(continued page 4)**



Gem Lake Responds to Water Gremlin Issue (continued from page 1)

Much of the documentation dated to a time when the records were not available electronically. This required hands-on research through many boxes of records, looking for orders for TCE. In December of last year, the MPCA was informed that WG had not achieved the required 95% control of emissions that was required since at least 2009 and that control equipment was running with unknown efficiency. From December of 2018 through January of 2019, WG exchanged emissions information with the MPCA. On January 11 of this year, WG informed the MPCA that the levels of TCE emissions released varied from time to time between a number that was higher than 5% to complete failure of the scrubbing equipment that was supposed to prevent more than the permitted amount of emissions to be released into the air. The response of the MPCA was to allow them to voluntarily and immediately cease the use of TCE in their operations. (TCE is used as a degreaser in the manufacturing process.) The alternative to a voluntary shutdown would have simply been mandatory shutdown through a formal order from the MPCA. The voluntary shutdown of the production line using TCE happened on January 14, 2019.

What are the risks based on the data?

TCE is one of the most studied industrial chemicals in use today. It is used primarily to degrease metal parts, but is also found in many household products such as adhesives, paint removers, etc. High levels of exposure to airborne TCE can increase percentages for certain cancers in humans (kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, liver cancer). Several variables go into a person's risk of contracting an illness. These variables can include an individual's genetic inclination to get a disease, the length of exposure and the intensity of that exposure. Even with intense exposure to risk factors, a person does not always become ill. My grandmother, for instance, smoked from her teen years to her death in her mid-80's, without contracting lung cancer. The Minnesota Department of Health estimates that airborne levels of TCE could have been as high as 200 micrograms per cubic meter of air at the locale closest to the facility, which is based on 2018 use, projected to be the highest levels. The Minnesota Department of Occupational Safety and Health sets the allowable level of voluntary exposure to airborne TCE to be 270,000 micrograms five days per week, eight hours a day. While the Minnesota Department of Health sets the levels

of involuntary exposure to TCE, there are several metrics to keep in mind: lifetime and short term exposure. The lifetime level is currently set at 2 micrograms per cubic meter of air. This lifetime exposure would theoretically result in one additional case of cancer out of 100,000 people. The Minnesota Department of Health looks at historical data and assigns general risk of cancer at 45% of Minnesotans likely contracting some form of cancer in their lifetime. This is a general statistic that accounts for exposure to all types of risks, not limited to TCE. In theory, if 45,000 out of 100,000 in Minnesota were exposed to TCE for a lifetime, the cancer statistic could rise to 45,001. Short term exposure is considered incidental and transitory, such as airborne exposure as you are driving through the area. On January 1, 2018, the MPCA announced that the short-term exposure level was going to be reduced from 2,000 to 2 micrograms per cubic meter of air, effectively an unattainable level.

Once the new guidelines were announced WG began researching options. It was concluded that even a 75-foot-high stack would not be sufficient to attain the goal of 2 micrograms. While the company was researching alternatives, data revealed that WG's consumption levels of TCE were excessively high. The permit WG was acting under required 95% of the TCE being used in manufacturing to be recaptured by scrubbers, allowing 5% to be released into the air. Water Gremlin consumption level was estimated by replenishment orders and was revealed to be significantly higher. This prompted WG to notify the MPCA of permit violations in the summer of 2018.

Settlement with the MPCA a.k.a. The Stipulation Agreement

There was much made of the short time in which the MPCA and WG came to agree to terms and form a Stipulation Agreement (SA). It is the position of the MPCA that the short duration from the time shutting down operations to the resumption of operations is a good thing-and they have valid points. It allowed the MPCA to conduct significant WG oversight. It saved the State of Minnesota from having to pay for a **(continued on page 3)**

Gem Lake Responds to Water Gremlin Issue (continued from page 2)

lawsuit to compel WG to comply with what are agreed upon terms. The SA includes a significant fine of \$7M. A portion of this (\$4.5M) was deposited into the state environmental fund. The remaining monies are dedicated to other purposes as described in the data pack mailed this past month to Gem Lake residents.

All of that said, other factors were involved in the short duration of WG agreeing to the Stipulation Agreement, most importantly and simply it was supply chain economics. The WG facility manufactures enough terminals for 60,000,000 batteries per year, accounting for 50% of battery demand in the United States. These terminals are used on dozens of varieties of battery types including automobiles, golf carts, lawn tractors, uninterruptable power supplies, etc. Because the production line had been shut down from January 14 through March 1, 2019, other manufacturing facilities throughout the United States that rely on WG battery terminals were having to shut down their operations. This ripple effect was the motivating factor for WG to settle the matter quickly.



What is Being Done Now

Per a document available at the MDH website as of April 2019: "There is no information to indicate that drinking water is affected by the contaminate releases from the Water Gremlin facility at this time. To provide additional reassurance to residents near the Water Gremlin facility, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) began sampling a select number of private wells that represent groundwater near the facility. Water samples were analyzed at the MDH Public Health breakdown

Laboratory for a standard list of 68 volatile organic compounds, including TCE and its products. No contaminants were detected in the first five wells sampled. The MDH plans to sample an additional eight wells in the immediate area and will provide the results to the community when they are available." There will also be ground testing for contamination in the affected area.

Legislation that May Benefit Residents in the Area

Minnesota Senate Bill #2307 and Minnesota House Companion Bill #2368 are making their way through the Congress. If these bills pass, the \$4.5M in the general environmental fund will be moved to a TCE emission response account that will be made available to Gem Lake, White Bear Township and the City of White Bear to spend locally. This is a unique opportunity for our communities. If you internet search for the bills, you can read the actual legislation. If you have any questions that haven't been answered about this issue, please attend the next Gem Lake City Council meeting and bring them up. We will do our best to answer or to direct you to sources of information.

Gem Lake Villas Continue to Sell Well

Home sales continue to go well within the Gem Lake Villas project on County Road E. As of mid-April, a total of 14 of the 30 home sites are spoken for, according to Katie Brown, New Home Consultant for Hanson Builders, Inc., which is constructing the project. In addition, there are two "quick move in" homes available for sale. The project began last Spring on land once owned by Tom Hansen.



City News Page

Scholarship Awards Given to Three Seniors (continued from page 1)

in the fall. She has been very involved in high school musicals, choir, and other activities. Emily is an honor roll student. She has been employed at Gem Lake Hills Golf Course and at a local restaurant.

Michael Lovett, Superintendent of White Bear Lake Area School from 2008-2017 said the following of Emily: "She is a committed student, a curious learner and exceptionally disciplined in her music and in the whole of her school and personal life."

Makena Pratt is graduating from White Bear High School and plans to pursue a career in civil engineering, beginning with the University of Minnesota. She has been active as a captain of the golf team, the tennis team and the math team at White Bear High School. She was also in the National Honors Society.

Makena served as the student liaison to the school board and was once Engineering Student of the Year. She is employed at Dellwood Hills Country Club. Daniel Rossiter, Engineering Instructor at the White Bear North Campus says the following about Makena: "She is a student who has an exceptional aptitude towards engineering. Her ability to understand and apply mathematical and scientific concepts to solve problems is quite remarkable."

Issac Tessier is graduating from White Bear Lake High School and plans to pursue a career in computer science, beginning at Carlton College. In addition to being an honor roll student, he has been active in sports such as basketball and as a High School Ambassador.

Chris Campbell of the South Campus Language Arts Department said the following about Isaac: "He's a self motivated learner, who doesn't need any hand-holding. Give him the basic tenets of an assignment and he off to the races. I know Isaac is into sports, basketball especially. As teamwork is important on the court, the same can be said about academics. If given a group task, Isaac isn't one to sit back and let others work around him."

Congratulations to our three award recipients!! There will be a formal award ceremony at White Bear High School on May 15.

There are Rules About Where Your Snow Can Get Dumped

It is not permissible in Minnesota to plow your snow onto your neighbor's side of the street or into the roadway or ditches in general. This has been the subject of several recent calls to Heritage Hall. Due to the heavy snowfall totals this year, there have been complaints of what we will call "unfair snow rearrangement." Intentionally plowing or blowing snow onto a public road way which results in any dangerous condition is a violation of Minnesota Statute #169.42 and Gem Lake Ordinance 86.

City Looking to Hire Temporary Help for Summer

Gem Lake will be working to digitize its records and files this summer to take care of a growing problem with space.

The City is seeking to hire a person to do this work throughout the summer, using equipment and software that has been purchased for the job.

It is projected that the job could last three to four months, but could end sooner, depending on work progress. It is envisioned as a full time temporary job and would involve hours that mirror when Heritage hall is open. The pay would be \$13 per hour. We would like to hire someone immediately. Interested parties should contact Gloria Tessier at 651-747-2792.

Sewer Billing

Did you know that your quarterly sewer bill can be emailed rather than sent to you via the US Postal Service? If you would like your bill emailed, contact Gloria Tessier at Gloria.Tessier@gemlakemn.org. Send the email address you want the bill sent to, in addition to the property address associated with the bill. Or, call 651-747-2792 and leave your email address and property address. The next bill will be emailed!

Don't want to write out a check four times a year? Take advantage of our automatic bill pay through your checking account. Call the above listed phone number to set it up!

Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Update

By Jim Lindner, Gem Lake City Council Member

The Rush Line BRT Policy and Advisory Committee met on Thursday, February 28. Several changes in committee personnel resulted in the need to elect new officers. As a result, White Bear Lake Mayor Jo Emerson was elected committee chair and Gem Lake council member Jim Lindner was elected vice chair.

Program updates relating to the environmental and health impacts of the proposed project, along with reviews of the various recent public engagement events were presented.



A new station on Cook Ave. along Phalen Boulevard is now part of the project scope. This was a direct result of community engagement amongst the Hmong community in St. Paul. A significant part of the meeting involved review of several options relating to the station in downtown White Bear Lake. Based on this review, the committee recommended Option A, located between 7th and 8th streets adjacent to Bear Town Bar and Grill.

The project is now in its environmental review phase, which is expected to run for the next 18 months or so. All proposed stations will now be analyzed thoroughly to test viability and identify any ancillary improvements that may be needed to make each station a reality.

The project website, <https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/roads-transit/transit-corridors-studies/rush-line-brt-project> now contains a fully interactive map where the public can enter comments all along the proposed route, which is documented in detail. There are regularly scheduled Policy Advisory Committee meetings that take place approximately every couple of months.

Impressive Recycling Numbers for 2018

Over 90% of Gem Lake households participated in city wide recycling every month last year. Of the 282 possible pick up sites, an average of 90.73 households remembered to put out their container every two weeks.

The results of our recycling efforts were impressive, according to a recent report by Waste Management. A total of 32.7 tons of materials were collected. This broke down into the following categories:

- *19.2 tons of newspaper
- *4.2 tons of glass
- *1.3 tons of aluminum and steel cans
- *4.6 tons of cardboard and mixed paper
- *1.1 tons of plastic
- *0.3 tons of scrap steel
- *1.9 tons of residue

Residue refers to material that was put in the recycling container, but was not able to be recycled. Watch your newsletter or the Gem Lake website for recycling dates.

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This newsletter is also posted on the city's web-site under the "Documents" section and the "News and Updates" section.

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.gemlakemn.org

Meetings: May and June, 2019

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall in May and June of this year.

May 7, 2019

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

May 13, 2019

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

May 21, 2019

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

June 4, 2019

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

June 10, 2019

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

June 18, 2019

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Your Gem Lake City Council

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For more information on meetings, city ordinances, recent events, permit procedures, etc. please consult the Gem Lake web-site. The address is www.gemlakemn.org

Each Gem Lake Newsletter is also posted on the web-site under the

"Documents" and "News and Updates" section.

Please email your ideas, comments and suggestions. See box at left for detailed contact information.

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