

May, 2020

Volume 14, Issue 2

Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- Gem Lake Residents Share Their Quarantine Experiences
- Major Vandalism to Golf Course
- Tribute to the late Mayor Bob Uzpen

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- June 3
- June 17
- July 1
- *Tip: put out your bin the night before for 7 a.m. pick-up.*

Mayor Bob Uzpen Passes Away from ALS

It is with great sadness that we announce that Mayor Bob Uzpen, age 72, passed away on May 13 due to complications from ALS, according to his spouse Dr. Kimberly Anderson.

Bob had been seriously ill for several years and fought bravely through a variety of health-related issues. He was determined to try to serve out his term as Mayor, which would have been completed at the end of this year. Bob had been wheel-chair bound for the past few years and made it his goal to quietly serve his community as long as possible. Things grew increasingly more challenging for him this year, but the concept of public service kept him going.

Bob spent decades in the banking field, including many years as a Vice President for US Bank. His financial background proved to be enormously helpful in his job as mayor. He was instrumental in cutting expenses and trying to keep property taxes as low as possible.

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Surviving the “New Normal” Residents Share Their Lock-down Stories

After months in COVID-19 quarantine, Gem Lake residents have crafted their own survival skills for dealing with this unprecedented situation. According to an informal email survey, almost everyone has experience times when they can't figure out what day it is. Most have established some kind of routine for balancing daily tasks such as school, work, household chores and leisure activities.

Some say they are spending more time with family, watching more TV, getting outside more, cooking more, exploring or learning more, and perhaps contemplating the future more.

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Surviving the New Normal—Residents and Businesses Share their Stories (continued from page 1)

However, the concept of dealing with less, has very much come into play—eating out less, shopping less, and by far the most impactful and the most painful, interacting less with cherished friends and family members. Gem Lake residents are craving the chance to be with their loved ones without the social distancing restrictions. Translation: most of us want a bear hug from a buddy.

For instance, high school senior Corey Doran, says that while he is sad to have no graduation ceremony this year, what he really missing is time with his friends, especially in his senior year.

A serious student, Corey wants to get on with college and a career, but he also misses being with friends as part of the learning process. He says on-line learning works well from a technical point of view. The challenge for him is that the work can be done at any point during the day. He finds he is staying up later, turning his former school schedule upside down.

Tim and Sherren Heil are coping with their quarantine time by getting outside more. Their survival skills have included organizing a safe and socially distant neighborhood activity.

“Sherren and I live in the cul du sac at the end of Big Fox Road. Because of the stay at home order, the local pickle ball courts are closed. So, I bought a portable pickle ball net and drew court lines in the cul du sac. I supply hand sanitizer for the group and we play wearing N95 masks. Strange times!!”

Tony Scornavacco and Michael Garrett on the south end of the lake festooned their beautiful barn with a large wooden heart. It was done as a show of solidarity to their neighbors and, also, essential workers in the community.

Isaac Nelson, who acts as a caretaker for several properties in Gem Lake says he has been helping with grocery shopping and other tasks. He notes that one of the families he is working with is very careful to limit the number of restaurants they use



for take-out food and the number of grocery stores they will shop at. “I see people taking this very seriously to stay healthy,” says Isaac.

Tolga Ata, who owns and runs Black Sea Restaurant on County Road E says things have been challenging, but he is managing okay, thanks to loyal customers. “Our customers have been so supportive and we are really grateful.”

Thankfully, Black Sea had significant take out business already, which softened the blow of shutting down inside dining. He had to lay off his employees and is primarily doing everything himself, from order taking to cooking. Lately, business has picked up a bit and he was able to hire a part-time person to help out on weekends.

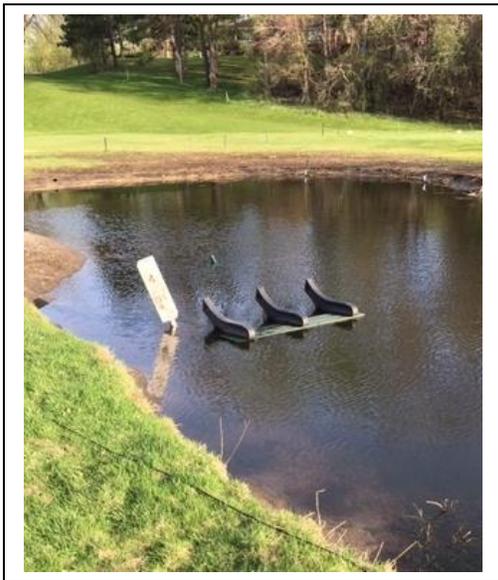
He is working fewer hours and is able to spend more time with his daughter, who is three years old. This has been a plus, but he looks forward to getting back to normal activities for his restaurants too.

Significant Damage Done by Vandals at Gem Lake Hills Golf Course—Leads Sought

Sometime during the evening or early morning hours of May 3-4, an enormous amount of vandalism was done to Gem Lake Hills Golf Course.

The scope of the damage briefly halted and/or diverted play on the course, caused significant expense and served as a “gut-punch” to the manager and the owners of the club, already struggling to serve the public during the pandemic.

Grounds keeper Brad Naylor, as well as an early golfer were first to be alerted to orange spray paint on the club house, covering walls, windows and doors. In addition, 20 golf carts had orange spray painted graffiti, slashed tires and slashed upholstery. Police were notified immediately and began an investigation.



Moving to check out the course next, staff member Naylor discovered massive damage to several greens, that had been in perfect shape the day before. The damage included huge holes, randomly dug in several places, one the size of a coffin. Piles of dirt were scattered around the greens. Greens were trampled and disturbed, making play nearly impossible in several areas of the course.

A satellite toilet was tipped over and had to be pulled back into place by a tractor. This messy problem had to be top priority.



Benches throughout the course were uprooted and thrown in the ponds. Many of the hand-carved hole markers were bent, uprooted and/or damaged. Some were found in a nearby lake. Cups were removed from several greens and thrown into ponds, along with hole flags. One vandal decided it would be funny to carve a diagram into the manicured grass.

Matt Greer, General Manager of the club, described the damage as devastating. “With all that is going on right now, we are working so hard to provide a safe environment for golfers. To see the level of damage and the maliciousness of it, was really a gut punch.”

The hard work of staff allowed them to keep disruption to a minimum. Course Superintendent Tim Jansma arrived and immediately put together with his crew to begin the painstaking task of trying to get the course playable again. “Initially, I thought we would have to close for several days to a week or so,” said Matt. “Thanks to the hard work of staff, we were able to get play going, slightly modified, that very day. The turf damage is going to take a while to recover. Several greens needed to be reseeded, and then it takes a lot of TLC.”

In the aftermath, a sandblasting company had to be called in to deal with spray painted graffiti. Several areas of the club house then had to be repainted.

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City Meetings During the Pandemic

Believe it or not, there are actually rules adopted by the State of Minnesota that deal with holding municipal meetings during a state of emergency. The example given in the ordinance is, ironically, a pandemic. These rules cover how meetings should be held when the public cannot gather in the typical sense.

When a meeting has to be held remotely and during an emergency, the goal is to make the meeting as accessible as possible. The more limited access to the meeting will be, the less business a city is supposed to conduct. The idea is that if the public will have difficulty attending the meeting, due to short notice on the change of venue, or potential technical difficulties, then only the most minimal agenda items should be dealt with, so no one misses out on the opportunity for public comment. The Gem Lake City Council meeting which was held on March 17 covered approval of outstanding claims, so the bills could be paid on time, and approval of the minutes of the last meeting.

By the April 21 City Council meeting, the city clerk had enough time to post the information on the call-in meeting on the web-site and send out the information to every resident for whom we had an email address. Even so, the agenda was kept to a minimum. In addition to bill paying and approval of minutes, the agenda covered discussion of the Governor's executive order allowing for liquor sales through take-out orders at restaurants. A resolution regarding annual insurance coverage for the city was also discussed and approved. This constituted the entire agenda. One member of the public joined the meeting remotely.

The next City Council Meeting was held on May 19. Dial in information was sent out by email and posted on the web-site several days prior. (This is a good time to be sure the city has your email address if you would care to join in.) As the city progresses with the concept of remote meetings, it is hoped that an increasing number of items can be handled at each meeting. At the May meeting, transition issues relating to the Mayor's death had to be discussed.

The concept of remote meetings is new to municipalities around the state, as the current situation has never occurred before. Each is trying hard to meet the spirit of the rules and guidelines laid out by the State of Minnesota. By the time of our first experience with a dial in meeting, the State of Emergency declaration was a day old.

It is possible that the June city council meeting will be an actual live meeting. You are encouraged to participate in our next city council meeting, whether it is live or remote. Please call Gloria Tessier at Heritage Hall for more information.

Scholarship Program Update

There have been three applications to the annual Gem Lake Scholarship Program, which will be reviewed at the next council meeting.

The unusual nature of this year's circumstances are presenting the council with an unusual problem. The scholarship is funded by charitable gambling within the city. (pull-tab sales) With all bars and restaurants shut down since mid-March, receipts to cities have completely dried up. Typically, cities like Gem Lake receive and disburse gambling receipts every couple of months. In Gem Lake's case, donations were made early in the year to Willow Lake Elementary School and the White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf. These donations substantially depleted the funds available. No problem, in a typical year, as funds are always coming in.

One possible solution being discussed is to review and award scholarships as usual, with a special note about when the funds would be provided. For instance, the winners might be notified that they will receive their portion of whatever funds are available on a specified date, such as September 1.

Mayor Bob Uzpen Passes Away from ALS (continued from page 1)

Bob was an army veteran, doing his service from 1966-1969, during the Vietnam War era. He was not stationed in Vietnam, instead, serving out some of his time in Korea. Bob was initially elected to the position of Mayor of Gem Lake in 2008. He was re-elected in 2012 and 2016. During his tenure many projects were completed, such as the approval and build out of Gem Lake Villas, major municipal water projects for the business district, approval of the Hy-Vee Fast and Fresh Store for Hoffman's Corner, which has not yet started, and several significant road projects. He was a financial and strategic planning master, according to his city council.

Due to the current COVID-19 situation, Bob's funeral was limited to 10 people only. According to his family, there will be a memorial service later this year, depending upon the situation. Bob is survived by his wife Kimberly Anderson, as well as four children and 13 grandchildren.

Gretchen Artig-Swomley is now temporary acting mayor, until the council can formally appoint someone to fill the spot for the remainder of the term. That is projected to be discussed at the council meetings in June and/or July. Bob's term as mayor would have expired in December.

Significant Damage Done by Vandals to Gem Lake Hills Golf Course (continued from page 3)

According to White Bear Police Chief Julie Swanson, the crime is considered an open investigation. As a frequent golfer on the course, she calls this incident especially sad.

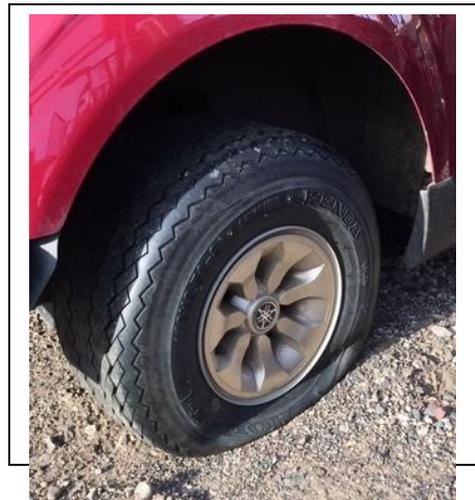
"We are asking neighbors to remain vigilant in the area. Call us if you notice any abnormal activity so we can send out patrols."

The police are evaluating leads and hope someone will hear something about who might be involved.

"Our mechanic has worked non-stop for almost two weeks to get the golf carts repaired, including tires, upholstery and graffiti removal. I am really grateful for

everyone's hard work," Said Greer. "We are already facing difficult conditions, because of the pandemic, and this just added to everyone's workload. It's so disappointing."

Gem Lake Hills Golf Course is owned by the Wilson Family, who also own and operate several other facilities, including Applewood Golf Course in



Stillwater. You are urged to support this family owned business by passing on any leads you may have to the police. One additional note to this story: the vandalism continued that night. Shortly before or after this damage was done, the granite entry signs and street signs at neighboring Hillary Farm Development were damaged. One homeowner's security camera captured a possibly relevant image.

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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: June and July, 2020

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held in June and July of 2020. In the good old days, all meetings were held at Heritage Hall. Check the web-site to determine if a meeting will be in-person or virtual.

June 2, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

June 8, 2020

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m. is **cancelled**.

June 16, 2020

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

July 1, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

July 13, 2020

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

July 21, 2020

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Your Gem Lake City Council

Bob Uzpen-Mayor

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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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