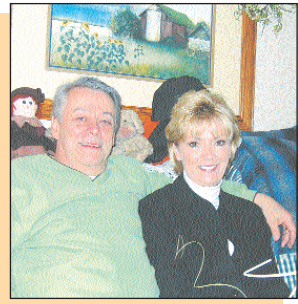


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UI2 team captures second state championship in a row, 1B



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Somerset schools show off visual and performing arts at special event, Page 1C

THURSDAY

New Richmond News

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Photo By Karl Puckett

David Thomassen and Doug Jacobsen pushed a stuck vehicle on East Sixth Street. They weren't alone. Even wreckers, law enforcement squads and snowplows got stuck in the heavy wet snow and needed a push or a pull.

Report says: Build two new schools

Remodeling, conversion of schools also recommended

By Karl Puckett
News staff reporter

A Long-range Facilities Planning Committee recommended, in a report delivered to the school board last Wednesday, that the New Richmond School District:

- Build a K-5 neighborhood elementary school with a capacity of 450 students because the district's most immediate space need is at the elementary level.

- Build a high school with a capacity of 1,200 that could be expanded to 1,600, and include an auditorium as part of the project.

See **Recommendations**/Page 3A

District arranges air tests

Steps taken to alleviate concerns about illness

By Karl Puckett
News staff reporter

Mike Williams, interim superintendent of New Richmond schools, told school board members last Wednesday that steps are being taken to look into suspicions by staff members that the work environment at West Elementary School is causing health problems including cancer.

Board members, who have been told by state public health experts there does not appear to be a link between

See **Health Concerns**/Page 3A

'One hell of a mess'

Life stops for snowy day

By Jeff Holmquist, Karl Puckett
News staff reporters

A pregnant woman, thinking she was about to give birth, was trapped on Interstate 94. An ambulance couldn't reach her.

A wrecker ran over a semi-truck driver whose vehicle he was trying to pull out of the ditch.

The driver of a milk truck, blinded by white-out conditions, hit the breaks at the last second but couldn't avoid being hit by a train.

Stories like those abounded Monday, when the nastiest snowstorm in years struck fast and with fury.

School was canceled. Main street was deserted. Hundreds were stuck in

Snow totals

- New Richmond:** 13.8
- River Falls:** 19
- Clear Lake:** 17
- Haugen:** 23

the ditch or stranded on major highways. Thousands more lost power to their homes.

Western Wisconsin residents won't soon forget where they were on March 13, 2006.

"One hell of a mess," St. Croix County Sheriff Dennis Hillstead said.

Officially, 14 inches of snow fell in New Richmond, according to the National Weather Service.

See **Snow**/Page 16A



More than a few cars were buried under 14 inches of snow and large drifts as the region was pounded by a late-winter storm. Roads were still difficult to navigate on Tuesday morning, although schools did open for business that day.

This little piggie went to the health care market...

Bio-secure facility will prepare for clinical trials

By Jeff Holmquist
Managing Editor

The cure for diabetes may someday come through New Richmond, thanks to a bunch of pigs.

Spring Point Project, headquartered in Minneapolis, is proceeding with plans to construct a 21,000-square-foot pig rearing facility on land near the airport.

Once the building is finished in February 2007, officials with the non-profit research organization plan to begin the costly process of raising hyper-healthy animals.

When the company receives Federal Drug Administration approval to proceed, "islet" cells from each pig's pancreas will be harvested for eventual

transplantation into diabetic patients.

If University of Minnesota clinical trials prove successful, production of millions of pigs will begin nationwide to address the expected demand for transplants.

The break-through research could eventually provide a cure for millions of diabetes sufferers worldwide, according to Spring Point.

The research

University of Minnesota scientists Scott Fahrenkrug and Bernhard Hering have already successfully transplanted pig islet cells into diabetic monkeys.

The procedure resulted in a prolonged reversal of the disease in the animals. Now they want to try it on humans.

Doctors are already aware that islet transplantation helps to reverse diabetes in human beings as well, but multiple deceased human donors are required for each successful transplant and the cost of the procedure typically

tops \$100,000.

Because doctors and researchers had already transplanted pig organs and tissues into humans, Hering and Fahrenkrug were convinced the use of pig islets was a possible solution to low supplies of human pancreas cells.

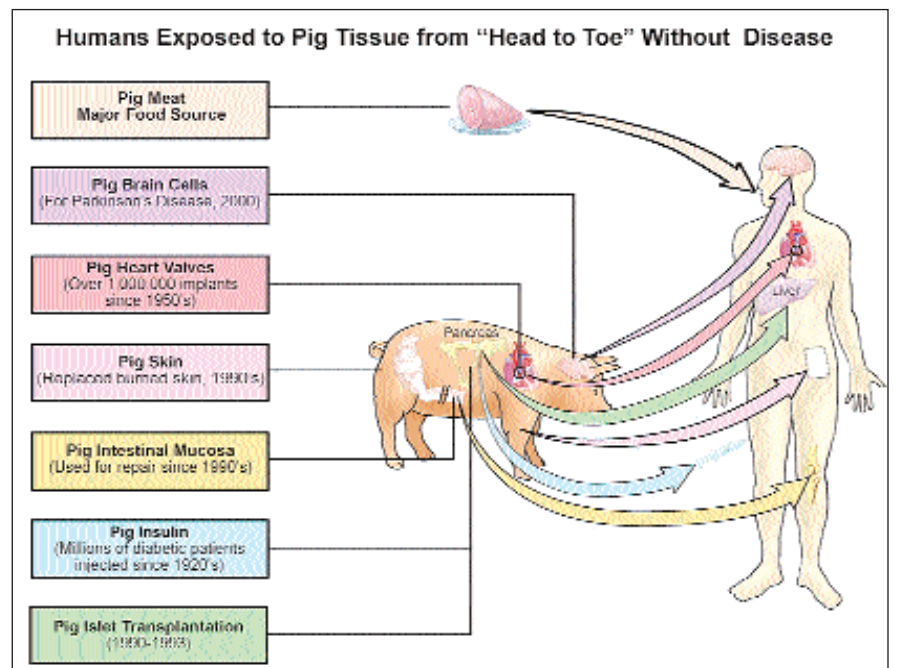
The problem with pig-to-human transplantation, however, is the FDA is very careful with its approval process. Regulators want to ensure that swine disease is not transferred to human diabetic patients.

According to Tom Spizzo, executive director of the Spring Point Project, the FDA's approval process for an eventual pig islet transplant into humans could take about two years.

In the meantime, Spring Point, in conjunction with the independent researchers, will work hard to perfect the science behind the procedure.

One major roadblock remains -- the development of effective anti-rejection

See **Spring Point**/Page 3A



Pigs are already used for a variety of treatments on humans. Islet transplantation could help cure diabetes as we know it.

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 Publication Number USPS 382-060
 FOUNDED IN 1869



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Periodicals Postage Paid at New Richmond, Wisconsin 54017 and at additional mailing offices.

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Established Sept. 15, 1869, as the St. Croix Republican by Abe C. Van Meter. The paper merged with the New Richmond Voice in June 1899 after a cyclone devastated the city. In 1899, Abe C. Van Meter turned the operation over to E.A.R. Van Meter. Under E.A.R. Van Meter's direction, the paper merged with the New Richmond News in February 1907 and was known for some time as the New Richmond News and Republican-Voice. John A. Van Meter

RECOMMENDATION: Committee sends issue to school board

Continued from page 1A

- Remodel West Elementary to increase security and improve the media center.
- Remodel the current high school for use as a middle school.
- Purchase land for the new elementary and high school.
- And study the feasibility of year-round school, to reduce the need for additional elementary facilities by 2010.

Information in the committee's report will be used by the school board as it considers what to ask taxpayers for in a future facilities referendum. A \$54 referendum failed by 13 votes last April and the board formed the committee to study facilities needs over the next 10 years before returning to voters. The recommendations were explained to board members by

Scott Needham, a St. Croix County Circuit judge from New Richmond who served as chairman of the 23-member committee, which met eight times since November.

Needham said committee members were diligent, "task oriented" and had no preconceived notions. It's his hope, he said, that the committee's report would be used by the board in coming up with a building proposal that will unite the community.

The committee used the highest enrollment projections from a consultant hired by the district last year as reasonable indicators of student enrollment in the next 10 years, he said. It also looked at previous reports by past facilities committees.

Committee members agreed that the district's two elementaries, middle school and high

school are at capacity and that "educational adequacy issues exist at all levels."

The committee worked urgently because it will take three years from the time a project is approved to completion, its report states.

The vote on the recommendations was 17 in favor and one opposed. Committee member Bob Ziller was the sole no vote and he offered a minority recommendation. Board member Judy Remington, a member of the committee, abstained from voting.

Needham said the committee's mission was to determine the district's building needs, not the tax impact or what could pass in a referendum. Those issues, he said, are in the purview of the board.

"Our focus was not on what it's going to cost, not whether

it's passable, but rather what our needs are," Needham said.

An architectural firm previously estimated for the district that building a new high school would cost around \$44 million, not including an auditorium, and that a new elementary school would cost about \$12.5 million.

The architect estimated that remodeling the high school into a middle school would cost between \$4.8 million to \$5.5 million and remodeling West Elementary would cost between \$2 million and \$2.2 million.

Needham said the committee wanted to remind the district that construction costs continue to rise. And he said the district should start annually updating its facilities needs.

The committee recommended that a building committee be established if a referendum is

approved and the building project moves forward.

The committee is recommending that the district keep the middle school even if the current high school is converted to a middle school. The old school could be used for a future use as determined by the district, the committee said.

Current elementary enrollment is about 1,170 and the capacity in the elementary schools is 1,072. Enrollment is projected to be 1,549 in 2010 and 1,652 in 2015, based on a study done last year by Hazel Reinhardt Consulting Services of Minneapolis.

High school enrollment today is around 877 — the building's capacity is 900. Enrollment is projected to increase to 1,083 by 2015, based on Reinhardt's study.

HEALTH CONCERNS: District seeks more testing of building

Continued from page 1A

cancer and the building, nonetheless applauded the moves, which include air tests.

"We just have to support these people and make sure there's nothing there," board member Greg Gartner said.

West teachers remain skeptical. Casey Swetlik, the husband of Heidi Swetlik, a teacher at West and a cancer survivor, showed board members dirty air filters that had been removed from heating units in West classrooms. They looked like a heavily clogged lint trap from a clothes dryer.

"I'd like to show you things that fuel our skepticism and fuel our concern," Swetlik said before pulling out the dirty filters.

temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. In addition, the state officials will assist the district in implementing Tools for Schools program to regularly monitor heating and ventilating systems and moisture. The kit is recommended by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and has been ordered and received by the district.

- William Otto and Tom Stieger from Health Hazard Evaluation Section of the state Division of Public Health's Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health will visit New Richmond and address the school board, staff and residents at 7 p.m. April 24.
- The state Division of Public Health's Toxicology and Research Unit reported to the district that exposure to the pesticide Cygon 2E, which had been applied at the school in 1981, is not associated with the development of cancer.
- "At this point we're doing the things that I would say are common sense," board president Lester Jones said.

He said some members of the board and Williams had visited by telephone with state public health officials.

After speaking with the experts, board member Judy Remington said it's unlikely the district will find a link between cancer and the building. But she added that the situation at West was an opportunity for the district to investigate making all of its schools safer and cleaner.

"I think that's going to be the focus rather than being able to draw a direct line," she said.

Swetlik told board members that he couldn't thank them enough for becoming more aware of the concerns and issues at West.

He added that he still was skeptical because it had taken the district a long time to act on the concerns. He then produced the filters.

"This is what concerns us as parents, as teachers who teach in that building," Swetlik said.

He said he wanted to make board members "part of our nightmare."

"It worries us to death," he said of the concerns about health issues and the building.

Swetlik has said that teachers are not only concerned about cancer. Besides the known 25 former and current employees who have or have had cancer in the last two decades or so,

another 10 employees have had severe allergy-respiratory-sinus problems and six people have had thyroid problems, he said.

Bob Parent, the district's new supervisor of building and grounds, on the job since January, said he didn't know why the filters hadn't been changed sooner. He said the fact that they needed to be changed did not mean fresh air isn't being allowed into the building. Gartner said that anybody who has a forced-air furnace has seen a similar filter. "Mine look just like that at home," he said.

Heidi Swetlik raised concerns about the district's liability insurance conducting the air quality study. She said she wanted an unbiased agency doing the testing so teacher's know the results are legitimate.

"Right there, that's a little bit of a red flag," she said.

District officials noted that state officials would be conducting tests as well.

In August 2005, the district assigned school nurse Joan Simpson to look into cancer cases at West in the preceding 20 years after staff members raised concerns.

Simpson gave a report on her findings to the board Feb. 27.

Since 1983, she learned of 25 people who had worked at the school who had suffered from cancer. The types of cancer varied: Lymphoma (3), breast (8), ovarian (3), bone (1), colon (2), uterine (1), thyroid (1), skin (4), brain (1) and unknown (1).

The total number of employees who worked at West from 1983 to 2006 was 262, Simpson reported.

Based on the advice of five experts she spoke with, Simpson said there appears to be no known correlation between the incidence of cancer in the staff at West and the building. The experts said that the incidence of cancer, based on the information the district has been able to obtain, was not higher than average.

"Although the concern found in your school district is understandable, it is not unusual to observe cancer among your co-workers over the years," Henry Anderson, chief medical officer of the state Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health wrote to the district.

SPRING POINT:

Continued from page 1A

drugs that do not put the transplant patients at risk -- but researchers are hopeful that two more years of experiments will bring positive results.

Spring Point's ultimate goal is to transplant pig islet cells in the first human volunteer patients within three years.

If all goes well, the expected cure would be available at a relatively low cost to all diabetics shortly thereafter.

"The goal is to have a cure for anybody who needs it," Spizzo said. "Not just for anybody who can afford it."

Estimates are that there are 20.8 million diabetics in the United States today, and more than a million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed annually across the nation.

on hold to push the pig islet experiment through the regulatory maze.

Spring Point officials expect \$20 million will be needed to finish the research and make the cure available to all who need it. About \$4 million has been raised so far.

"We have sufficient funds to start the project on schedule," Ryan said.

Interestingly, even though a bundle of money could be made from this major health care development, Spizzo said those behind Spring Point have only one goal in mind -- ending diabetes.

"It's completely altruistic," he said. "They are singularly focussed on finding a cure. They want to get there quick."

Spizzo said it's an honor to be involved with a group of scientists and business people who will not gain financially by the research but are forging ahead with such passion.

"This is very unique," he admitted.

eases could be transferred to the facility.

- The site is in a "somewhat rural" setting.
- The location is close to the University of Minnesota, so scientists can quickly get to the facility.
- The facility is adjacent to major transportation arteries so harvested islets can be delivered quickly for future transplants. ("The airport was a definite benefit, but not a determining factor," Ryan added.)

The fact that city officials encouraged the organization to build locally also helped Spring Point to decide on the site.

"We were embraced very much by the city," Ryan said. "They understand what the goal is and support it."

The proposed building will have seven separate animal housing units, each with a completely different air handling, heating and air conditioning unit.

Specialized water and septic systems will also be installed in the building. Spring Point officials are working with state and local regulatory agencies to meet all of the requirements for such a facility.

"The systems will be second to none," Ryan explained.

Because the facility is considered "bio-secure," Spizzo said there will be little if any odor detectable by neighbors.

"It will not be a high-odor facility," he said.

Once open, the facility will employ between five and six full-time employees, including a veterinarian, animal technicians and veterinary technicians.

The pigs
 Eventually 88 pigs will call New Richmond home. They will all be direct descendants of "Abraham," a boar from South Dakota who was identified as having the genetics that closely match humans. Those genetic traits will help to ensure the success of transplants.

A Hutterite community in South Dakota is presently charged with breeding the pigs that will eventually be used in the clinical trials. (Hutterites are a group of Christians who originally emigrated to the United States from Europe. The group is known for their ability to raise disease-free animals).

Sows that are ready to give birth will eventually be shipped to the New Richmond facility, where they will undergo a cesarean section.

C-section pig births will reduce the risk of a mother passing a disease on to the piglet.

Once the pigs are born, Spring Point will attempt to isolate the animals to significantly reduce the chance for disease.

The extremely healthy pigs will provide the greatest chance clinical trial success, Spizzo said.

To harvest the islet cells from the pigs, the animals will be euthanized. Spring Point officials are discussing ways to use the remaining carcasses for further research and/or for food.

After the trials
 If the research holds true and a cure results, Spring Point officials expect that the FDA will give approval for mass production of donor pigs.

Once the clinical trials are through, Spizzo said pigs used for islet transplants will not be required to be raised in bio-secure facilities like New Richmond.

"This is the only one that will require this level of bio-security," Ryan said.

Construction of the New Richmond facility is scheduled to begin in May.

Supply vs. demand

The Spring Point Project was formed 18 months ago to help raise enough donor pigs to meet the future demand for islet cells. A number of people who serve on the non-profit board have a stake in finding a quick cure for diabetes.

"I have a daughter who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was 9 years old," said Pat Ryan, president of a large Twin Cities-based developer, Ryan Companies U.S., and a Spring Point board member. "I promised her I would do everything I could to find a cure."

Ryan admits to getting "straight C's" in science, so it was unlikely that he would personally develop a treatment. That's why he jumped at the chance to serve on the Spring Point board and spearhead the organization's construction projects.

It's a similar story for Spring Point founder Tom Cartier. A Duluth insurance agent, Cartier's 23-year-old son is anxiously awaiting a cure.

Cartier has put much of his personal and professional life

HELP WANTED - HEALTH ASSISTANT
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW RICHMOND

Applications are being accepted for one (1) full-time health assistant position at West Elementary. Starting hourly rate with certification/licensure \$10.38/hour. Hours are 7:45 a.m.-3:15 p.m. M-F based on a school calendar year. Benefits available under the Teacher Assistant's Contract.

Required:

- Certification/licensure for CMA, EMT, Paramedic, LPN or other similar medical training.
- Current CPR/AED and First Aid Certified
- Willingness to perform nursing procedures with training and supervision as delegated by the District Nurse
- Basic computer operation skills
- Able to lift 50 lbs.
- A positive attitude and enjoys addressing young school-aged children's health care needs.

Application forms are available either online at www.newrichmondwi.org or at the Administration Office, 837 E. Eleventh Street, New Richmond, Wisconsin between the hours of 7:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Application deadline is March 24, 2006.

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