



AMANDA ODESKI / NEWS TRIBUNE

Mike Berg, owner of Seagull Creek Fishing Camp, fishes for walleyes on Sagana Lake on Tuesday while guiding. Firefighters saved Berg's camp from the Ham Lake fire on the Gunflint Trail north of Grand Marais, and now he's gearing up for a summer of guiding.

Along the trail, fresh fish tales

HAM LAKE FIRE AFTERMATH:

The fire hasn't discouraged anglers from coming north for walleyes, and early-season fishing has been productive along the Gunflint Trail.

BY SAM COOK

NEWS TRIBUNE OUTDOORS WRITER

ON THE GUNFLINT TRAIL — The Ham Lake fire may have blackened 36,000 acres along the Gunflint Trail. But it couldn't get the walleyes.

Thanks to the efforts of firefighters, Mike Berg's Seagull Creek Fishing Camp near the tip of the trail survived the fire. Now, Berg's guides and others along the upper Gunflint Trail are back on the water, putting their clients in touch with Saganaga Lake's trophy fish.

In Outdoors

Anglers and guides at the Seagull Creek Fishing Camp are already logging big walleyes on the camp's "Hawg Board."

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"First day, first fish, first bite," said Berg, 49, who has owned Seagull Creek Fishing Camp for 20 years.

Members of his family who were fishing with him boated all kinds of big walleyes. Son Curtis Blake landed a 31-incher. Daughter Jessica Berg-Collman got herself a 29 and a 27½. Mike also picked up a 28 and a 27.

"The resource is still there," Berg said.

Anglers who want to get at those big walleyes have not been dissuaded by the fire or the notion that some shorelines may be

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Coming Monday



The voices of Northeastern Minnesotans will bring to life the characters of the CBS television show "Creature Comforts," which debuts Monday. The comedy, a staple of British television for years, pairs the voices of ordinary people with Plasticine animals, such as flies atop a partially eaten hamburger and other such unusual situations.

"I'm alive, and I'm not supposed to be."

RITA RONCHI of Maple, who nearly died in a car accident one year ago Monday

A car crash left Northwestern star athlete Rita Ronchi in a coma and required the amputation of her right leg. In the year since the accident, Ronchi has regained normal brain function and can walk with assistance. She's planning a party Monday to celebrate her recovery.



BOB KING / NEWS TRIBUNE

Marcie Crain, physical therapist at Miller-Dwan Medical Center, lends support as Rita Ronchi walks on her prosthetic leg from one room to another during a therapy session Friday.

STEP BY STEP

BY RICK WEEGMAN

NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Walking is an activity most people don't think twice about.

For Rita Ronchi, walking is a goal she's focused on for close to a year.

That goal became a public reality May 25 when she walked across the stage in the Northwestern High School gym in Maple — with the aid of a walker and a prosthetic right leg — to receive her high school diploma to a thunderous ovation.

"I don't think there was a dry eye in the whole gymnasium," said her longtime friend Nate Thoreson, a fellow graduate. "It was like someone hit a home run or scored the game-winning touchdown. I've never heard it that loud in that gym."

Those small steps were the culmination of large strides

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DEREK MONTGOMERY / NEWS TRIBUNE

In the year since the accident, Ronchi, 18, has progressed from having a 1 percent chance of survival to crossing the stage at her high school graduation.

ONLINE: View a slideshow of Ronchi's recovery at duluthnewstribune.com

MEDICINE

Diabetes research taps cells of piglets

BY BRANDON STAHL

NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

It's like something out of the X-Files: Cameras and a state-of-the-art security system protect a building that at first glance appears to be nothing more than a large storage shed placed on the outskirts of a small Western Wisconsin town.

Only a select group of people are allowed deep inside the building — and before that, they must remove their clothes and jewelry and take a long shower that includes using a specialized soap and mouthwash before getting into sterilized garments. Anyone wanting to get out must take another shower.

Their primary job is to work with about 50 piglets, each of which is being raised for the sole purpose of breeding more pigs.

The facility is the vision that has become reality for Duluth businessman Tom Cartier — even though he's only been inside once, and that was before any pigs lived there. He wants the facility to remain free of any outside pathogens.

"We're not taking any chances," he said.

The piglets, Cartier and others believe, are the key to curing diabetes.

Last year the University of Minnesota announced that 12 monkeys given pig's islet cells — those produced by the pancreas that produce and secrete insulin — were cured of diabetes. The lead researcher on the study, Bernhard Hering, a professor of surgery at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, says the same treatment can cure human type 1 diabetes.

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CORRECTION

A word was dropped in the editing of a Saturday column about a former Duluth Central High School student who failed to receive a diploma because of his service in World War II. It should have read, "In 1942 — the year after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor ..."

The News Tribune regrets the error.

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FISH | Fish biting, anglers returning after Ham Lake fire

From Page A1

burned over. They're calling. They're booking trips.

"At least for the customers I have, none of them have canceled because of the fire," said Bob Baker, who owns Gunflint Pines Resort and Campgrounds just down the trail from Berg's place.

"We haven't had any cancellations on our guides," said Dave Schudy, a manager at Gunflint Lodge on Gunflint Lake. "There's been no ill effect on the fishing."

Berg said he lost about 10 days of bookings, but May never is a big month for Seagull Creek. June is the peak month, and July and August are always good. Some anglers who had to cancel in May will probably rebook later in the summer, Berg said.

Fishing wasn't foremost in the minds of anglers who called Seagull Creek in the days after the fire, Berg said.

"What do they want to know? First, 'Are you safe?'" Berg said. "And everyone is glad your place is still there."

Eventually, they want to know what Saganaga looks like.

"Sag has been burned," Berg said, "but it still has a lot of beautiful areas that haven't been touched by fire or the [1999] blowdown."

Berg's is the only fishing camp of its kind on the Gunflint Trail, but other resorts offer guided fishing for their guests who want it. Many anglers from the Northland fish without guides on Saganaga, Northern Light Lake in Ontario, Seagull Lake, Gunflint Lake, Little Gunflint Lake, Little North Lake and North Lake.

The Ham Lake fire shut down fishing on all of those lakes on Minnesota's fishing opener because a large portion of the Gunflint Trail was evacuated and closed to traffic. And few anglers made it up for the Ontario fishing opener May 19 because the

"You don't get over this one quickly. It affected too much property, too many people. It still wears on you. It came so close to me being one of them"

MIKE BERG, owner of Seagull Creek Fishing Camp, on the effects of the Ham Lake fire.

fire was still burning in Ontario.

Following the fire, it took a few days for businesses to re-establish phone and computer service. Land phone lines still haven't been restored near the end of the trail, including at Seagull Creek. Most businesses have been issued cell phones, and a temporary cell tower allows them phone service.

Already, grass is coming back at the edges of the burned areas. Spring peepers and chorus frogs are calling from the wetlands. The black-flies are out. Slowly, a sense of normalcy is returning to the area. But talk of the fire still creeps into many conversations, and when the wind is right, it carries the scent of a charred forest. Psychologically, the Ham Lake fire will weigh on residents' minds for a long time, Berg said.

"You don't get over this one quickly," he said. "It affected too much property, too many people. It still wears on you. It came so close to me being one of them."

"I'll always be able to walk away and go fishing somewhere. But this is home."

Now, Berg and other guides must deal with the challenge of low water, a drought-caused condition that existed before the fire.

Saganaga Lake is down several feet, said Baker, of Gunflint Pines.

"The other day I was fish-



AMANDA ODESKI / NEWS TRIBUNE

Cory Christianson, a fishing guide with Seagull Creek Fishing Camp, holds a 30-inch walleye he caught on Saganaga Lake. The shoreline behind him was burned in the recent Ham Lake fire, although much of Saganaga Lake's shoreline was untouched by the fire.

ing next to a cliff, and standing in the boat, the high-water line was at eye-level," he said.

Low water presents problems for some Gunflint Lake anglers who traditionally have taken their boats up narrow currents into Little Gunflint Lake, Little North Lake and North Lake.

"They can't get into North Lake right now," said Gunflint Lodge's Schudy. "And on Sag, you just have to be more careful. I hit a reef the other day."

Anglers can get a 16-foot boat into Little Gunflint and Little North Lake, Baker said, but not into North Lake. Some anglers are remaining on Gunflint Lake, fishing lake

trout and walleyes.

"Trout fishing has been really good," Baker said. "And they're still getting walleyes."

Walleye fishing continues to be productive on Saganaga. Seagull Creek clients have caught 26 walleyes longer than 28 inches already this spring in just seven days of fishing, compared to 24 in two weeks of May last year.

And Berg is getting his share. On Thursday, he caught three more of 28, 28½ and 29 inches.

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AMANDA ODESKI / NEWS TRIBUNE

Curtis Blake (left) holds a grocery bag while his dad, Mike Berg, drops in bags of walleye fillets after a day of guiding on Saganaga Lake. Berg owns Seagull Creek Fishing Camp.

DIABETES | Researchers say pig cells hold link to diabetes cure

From Page A1

According to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, up to 3 million Americans have type 1 diabetes, which makes a person dependent on insulin and leads to an increased chance of vision loss, stroke, heart disease, kidney failure, nerve damage and lower-limb amputations. It makes up about 5 percent to 10 percent of all diabetes cases and thousands of people die from it.

Hering and others believe that injecting healthy pig islet cells into humans can reverse their diabetes.

"What you need to call something a cure is unlimited supply and a safe anti-rejection protocol," Hering said.

The facility, located in New Richmond, Wis., is designed to be the unlimited supply. A few years ago Cartier said he met with Hering and another researcher who has been studying diabetes for several years, David Sutherland, who told Cartier that they had the answer to diabetes, but needed his help.

Cartier has a special interest in the subject — his son, Cory, has type-1 diabetes.

"They said I could use someone to lead the charge," Cartier said. "But I didn't know if I was up for the task."

A month later, Cartier said he began assembling a team which later formed Spring Point Project. After the results of the monkey research were released last year, Spring Point announced it would lead the



SUBMITTED PHOTO FROM SPRING POINT PROJECT

Chasa Armstrong, an animal care worker for the Spring Point project, holds a newborn pig at a facility in New Richmond, Wis. To Armstrong's left is an airlock where the piglets are passed from the delivery operating room into a biosecure area.

same research on humans. Groundbreaking on the \$6.2 million facility in New Richmond began in June 2006 and was finished in February 2007.

That's a relatively quick turnaround, but speed and adherence to deadlines is part of the plan for Spring Point.

"Everything [with other studies] is always five or ten or 15 years away," said Cartier, who owns Cartier Insurance, which is located in Lincoln Park/West End. "We're not letting any timetables get away from us."

The piglets at the facility in

New Richmond — chosen because of its proximity to the University of Minnesota and relatively inexpensive land

prices — were born there, though their mothers were brought in from a facility in Huron, S.D., after the building was completely decontaminated.

Researchers say the heightened caution and security is needed to keep disease away from the pigs. Aside from having blood drawn to ensure they're free of pathogens, the herd of pigs will lead a cushy life, said Adrienne E. Schucker, Spring Point's director of veterinary medicine. They will get constant attention, high-grade food and treats, toys to play with, back scratching devices, large spaces to play in, and most importantly, the encouragement to breed.

The next generation of pigs will be euthanized and their pancreases will be harvested for the first round of clinical trials.

Spring Point hopes to begin the trials in 2009 or 2010, followed by one more round of testing. Cartier, the chairman of the Spring Point board of directors, said if the transplants are approved by the FDA, he hopes that Spring Point can begin offering islet cells to the public in five to six years at a relatively afford-

ably cost. Spring Point is a nonprofit organization.

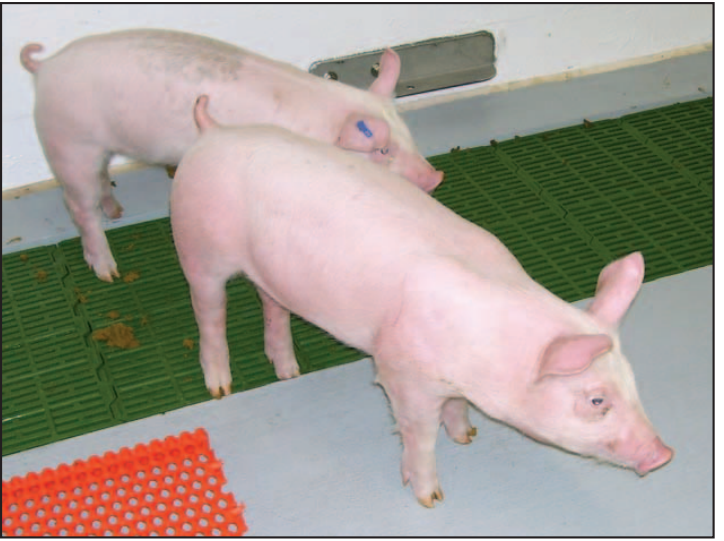
"Our whole goal is to make sure everybody gets cured, rich or poor," he said. "Right now, you have to be on a list to get a [human] transplant. Our goal is that you don't need a list — that you have enough supply."

That would probably take hundreds to thousands of pigs, and Cartier said Spring Point still hasn't decided how it will deliver the islet cells to humans, whether it be at one center in Minneapolis or cells shipped around the world. And there are still other hurdles to clear, such as more research that needs to be done to ensure that humans won't reject the pig cells.

Still, those involved in Spring Point are optimistic that the research will bring ground-breaking results.

"This is the cure. It's in front of us," Hering said. "We can execute and deliver this."

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SUBMITTED PHOTO FROM SPRING POINT PROJECT

These two-month-old pigs will be raised to breed more pigs at the Islet Resource Facility. The pigs' offspring will be used for research.

PHOTO BY AMANDA ODESKI FOR THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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