

Grant breathes life into new Living Lab

Gustavus students team up with museum to do research

By Jessica Bies
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A new \$3,000 stipend is breathing life into a Minnesota's first Living Lab, a new, interactive partnership

between Gustavus Adolphus College and the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota.

Awarded by the National Living Laboratory Initiative in Boston, the grant makes

it possible to launch the lab when the museum opens in March. Deb Johnson, the nonprofit's program director, said it will allow staff to evaluate the efficacy of any new exhibits, as well as bet-

ter connect with parents.

"We know it's going to look cool. We know it's going to have that 'wow' factor," Johnson said about

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Poll: Modest support for pot

Most Free Press readers voted in favor of expanding Minnesota's medical marijuana laws during the upcoming legislative session. At the same time, the majority of votes against expanding the law cited concerns that new legislation could lead to full legalization of marijuana use.

Our most recent online survey asked, "Minnesota passed limited medical marijuana legislation last session. It did not legalize the smoking of marijuana but it did allow select patients to be able to consume the plant's oils. Medical marijuana advocates plan to push for expanding the legislation this year because an estimated 33,000 potential patients are not currently covered. Do you support or oppose expanding Minnesota's medical marijuana law? Why?"

The majority of readers, 56 percent, voted in favor of expanding the law. The remaining voters divided between 29 percent opposing expanding the law and 15 percent voting they were unsure.

Comments at our polling site included:

■ "I deal with chronic pain and cannot take other pain relievers. Having another choice would be wonderful."

■ "The problem is once marijuana for medicinal uses is expanded, the next push is for legalizing marijuana. This should never happen. Look at the mess Colorado is in."

■ "I am aware of a multiple-handicapped child in our area who is in pain but doesn't qualify under the present regulations. She would likely benefit if medical marijuana were available to her."

■ "This appears to be a stepping stone to legalizing it for all, which would be unfortunate. Too many people underestimate the issues some have with the drug."

■ "Minnesota should follow the lead of Washington and Colorado in the legalization of marijuana. It is a nuisance to enforce for law enforcement and the legal system. Tax it for the revenue that can be put to good use."

■ "Let's stop filling our jails for victimless crimes."

The Free Press online poll is not scientific. Visit mankatofreepress.com to take part in the latest poll.



BRIEFS

Wreath campaign starting today

MANKATO — Firefighters are starting their annual campaign to keep Mankato residents aware of fire dangers during the holiday season.

The "Keep the wreath bright, prevent a red light" campaign starts today. A lighted wreath, filled with white lights, will be on display at the Department of Public Safety. The goal is to keep the wreath white. When there's a fire, firefighters replace a white bulb with a red bulb. If there's a fire with injuries or death, a blue light is used.

Cooking fires are common during the holidays. Candle use also contributes to the possibility of more fires. A few tips offered by Deputy Director Jeff Bengtson include making sure Christmas lights have adequate extension cords, doing any turnkey frying away from the house and not in the garage, and using battery-operated candles, which even come with aroma options, instead of real candles.

"We tend to see a slight uptick in fires during the holidays," Bengtson said. "The best tip is to attend your cooking."

There were two preventable fires that added red lights to the wreath last year between Thanksgiving and the New Year holidays. One was caused by an overloaded electrical circuit and the other was caused by an electrical fault in a bathroom fan.

MSU international students increase

MANKATO — An increase in Minnesota State University's international student population has resulted in a move up in ranking for the college. MSU is listed as 31st among master's institutions in an annual report released by the Institute of International Education.

The 2014 Open Doors report listed 1,044 international students enrolled at MSU, an increase of 885 students from the population listed in the 2013 report.

Figures used in each report are from the preceding fall. For example, the November 2014 report reflects fall 2013 enrollment data.

The college has moved up in the rankings in each of the last two years — it was ranked 38th in the 2012 report and 34th in 2013.

MSU's international student population represents 90 countries, according to a press release from the college.

Women running strong

FOR LIVESTRONG



Kerri Ambrose (left) and Kristi Schuck embark on an early-morning run outside the Mankato Family YMCA. The pair is running a 10K each day in November to raise money and awareness for the YMCA's Livestrong program.

Photo by John Cross

Two raise funds for cancer survivor program

By Nate Gotlieb
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Kristi Schuck and Kerri Ambrose are ready to run. It's 5:15 a.m., the sky is dark and they are standing in the Mankato Family YMCA lobby bundled in hats, light jackets and leggings. Outside of the layers are racing bibs.

Each bib says a name of a person who's been affected by cancer, along with a few words describing the person. The pair has accumulated dozens of bibs since they began their journey Nov. 1. A whole wall-full, in fact. They hang on a wall inside the YMCA.

"Every day we run with somebody that's just been treasured by another person," Schuck said. "We either honor somebody or are running in memory of somebody."

Schuck and Ambrose are running 10 kilometers, or 6.2 miles, every day in November to raise money and awareness for the YMCA's Livestrong program. The program helps cancer survivors regain physical and mental strength in a supportive environment. Schuck and Ambrose are hoping to raise \$6,200 for the program.

But for each of them, running is about more than just raising funds. It's also about their personal experiences with cancer.

Schuck's husband, Wes, was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer early in 2012 and was told he could

have two to six months to live. After months of chemotherapy, Wes has achieved stability with his cancer. He's still working and thriving, despite the side effects of chemotherapy, Schuck said.

Ambrose's mom was diagnosed with esophageal cancer last November and died 76 days later. Ambrose knew this month would be hard for her because of the anniversary of the diagnosis and because Thanksgiving was her mom's favorite holiday.

"I was just almost feeling sick facing it, because it was such a hard, hard month for me," she said. "I needed to have this month be about the positives of the cancer journey rather than what I've lost because of it."

Ambrose and Schuck have run together for about two years and recently ran the Mankato Marathon together. They had each read about women running every day to raise awareness, so they decided to undertake a similar project.

As of Tuesday, they had run 155 miles. They will have gone 186 by the end of the month.

"It's just a program that really gives the participants a sense of belonging. It gives them an opportunity to connect with other people that understand what they're going through."

JOY LEAFBLAD,
WELLNESS DIRECTOR AT THE YMCA

'A sense of belonging'

Ambrose and Schuck head outside, down the steps and onto the Red Jacket Trail. It's cold outside, but it's a refreshing cold, without the wind that had been so strong the day before. They run through the darkness and talk about their families, their backgrounds and their involvement with the Livestrong program.

The program meets twice a week at the YMCA. It's for anyone who's had cancer, no matter how long ago the survivor had it, and at no cost to him or her. The participants have individual exercise plans but workout in a group setting.

"It's just a program that really gives the participants a sense of belonging," said Joy Leafblad, wellness director at the YMCA. "It gives them an opportunity to connect with other people that understand what they're going through."

The YMCA has hosted the program since last fall and starts a new class every six weeks. Participants get YMCA memberships for three

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