

From SOS to desperation

Garrison School at wit's end regarding driver shortage

BY STU MERRY

GARRISON -- From SOS to desperation: That is the ongoing saga of the lack of bus drivers for the Garrison School District.

The Garrison School Board met on Tuesday, Nov. 19, and the main topic, as it was at last month's meeting, was the same -- what to do about the shortage of bus drivers.

Supt. Dr. Nick Klemisch said challenges lie ahead if no one steps forward.

"There's an absolute urgent need for drivers," he said.

"It is very likely routes will be cancelled next year unless we find drivers," he added.

Klemisch said the district is at the point where no other choice exists. This may also affect activities, as the need for activity drivers will continue as well.

And that could happen as soon as the first of the year.

"Field trips will be limited at best," he told the board.

Looking ahead down the road to next year, the district could find itself down to only 2-3 drivers at most. And according to Klemisch, that's dire news.

Routes could be cancelled all together. Like during last month's meeting, the discussion again was that the possibility exists where parents who live two or more miles from school would be compensated.

"This is not what we want for our families or our students," the superintendent said. "But it's quickly becoming our reality unless we can find more drivers."

Presently, the district has just three substitute big bus drivers and four mini-bus drivers, and all but one already works for



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- Garrison Supt.
Dr. Nick Klemisch

the district in another capacity or has other full-time positions.

"Even if we cancel routes and pay parents, we will still need drivers for the many activities and events that require buses," he told the board.

The district is also planning for the retirement of Transportation Director Keith Witt next year. His position would then likely become a 10-month contract with benefits and would require a Class B license, and the ability to provide some general maintenance.

To those considering coming on board, the district offers paid training to get a license. Route drivers start at \$27/hour. Activities drivers start at \$20/hour, with the clock starting when the bus starts and ending when you return.

In her report, Elementary Principal Shelley Fuller said activities abound at Bob Callies, including archery and youth sport.

Fall assessments are complete, and they went well, Fuller said. Gains were seen in reading, but results were down in math.

Santa's workshop is set for Dec 17. She praised the Hugh P. Minehan American Legion Post

65 and Auxiliary for hosting the Veterans Day program at the high school.

In his report, High School Principal Steve Dangel said basketball practice is underway. Esports, archery, cheer, dance, fall/winter sports are gearing up.

In other business matters, the board:

*Approved the trip of an administrator, likely Dr. Klemisch, to Sioux Falls, S.D. for a career fair Feb. 18 - 20.

*The board discussed E-Rate to assist in replacing the school's existing Wi-Fi and switches that are no longer able to be accessed without the purchase of licensing.

*In a related matter, board members talked about replacing the district's aging phone system, and the need to update. Members also discussed the secure door lock system and the need to update that as well.

*Approved the 2024-2025 Annual Audit completed by Rath & Mehrer reporting the district meets all state and federal requirements and commends the district for maintaining the general financial records in overall good order.

The following meetings were scheduled: All meetings held in the high school board room The next Regular Board Meeting is Dec. 22 at 6 p.m. A Policy Committee meeting is on Dec. 18 at 5:30 p.m.

Present at the meeting were Board President Rodger Affeldt, Chris Seidler, Lisa Maki, Julie Retterath, John Kallberg, John Crawford and Lucas Dusek.

Also, present was Supt. Nick Klemisch, and Principals Steve Dangel and Michelle Fuller.

Community Chest begins

BY STU MERRY

GARRISON -- It's the season for giving. Keeping that in mind it's time for the annual Community Drive in Garrison.

This year's goal is \$15,000. Funds will be distributed to various local groups and entities at the conclusion of the drive, Dec. 31.

More than 20 organizations or groups will receive funds from the annual fund drive.

The mission of the Commu-

nity Chest is to support local, area and state charities through a one-time fund drive, thus keeping the number of charitable drives throughout the community and area to a minimum.

As in years past, people can specifically designate their contribution to any one of the organizations listed or give a general financial gift that will be distributed by the Community Chest Committee.

A form can be found in the McLean County Independent.

Chamber seeks public input

Asks for community's help

BY STU MERRY

GARRISON -- The Garrison Chamber of Commerce wants the public's help -- helping to decide this year's community achievement winners.

This is a new avenue for the chamber -- to ask the public for their input as to whom the winner should be.

In years past, the chamber's Executive Committee made the decision. Now, it's being turned over to the public to decide as they are the ones interacting with those groups or individuals.

"This makes it easier for people to vote, (being in the Independent)" said Chamber President Megan Carlson.

Nominations are listed in an ad in the McLean County Independent. There are five customer service categories: Rising Star, Community Hero, Seasonal Employee, Team Excellence, and Youth Employee.

The awards are presented to someone from a Garrison business or organization who has provided exemplary service.

The Customer Service category includes Rising Star, Seasonal

Employee (one who works only through the summer or part of a year) and Youth Employee.

Community Hero Award and Team Excellence Award are next. Community Hero honors an individual who has gone above and beyond to make a positive difference in the community.

Team Excellence Award recognizes a group that has demonstrated outstanding collaboration, innovation and performance in achieving shared goals. This award exemplifies unity, neutral support and commitment to excellence, making a significant impact within the community.

"Feel free to nominate people, (or vote for one listed)," urged Carlson. "It's kind of a cool award to get, and to hopefully get more people in the door at the banquet."

Nominees include:

Rising Star: Shelly Amdahl (CHI-Garrison); Shaeli Kolden (Photographer)

Community Hero -- Jacque

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Coleharbor City Council approves liquor licenses

BY TYSON MATTHEWS
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Alderman Justin Pochant called the Coleharbor City Council meeting to order last Wednesday evening at City Hall.

The Harbor Bar owner Rob Russel attended the meeting to apply for a 2026 liquor license and a raffle permit.

"I would ask for a raffle permit through the city for the second annual ice fishing tournament in January," Russel asked. "Last year, we went through gaming and this year we'd like to go a different route. I'd rather go through the city."

Tickets will be sold in advance

for both the raffle and for entrance into the tournament.

The motions were passed by the council.

The Wolf Creek Winery owners Randy Albrecht and Darcie Hardy were also in attendance to renew its beer and wine license for 2026.

"Historically we've had a beer and wine license which did not include liquor; we'd like to expand it this year to include liquor," Albrecht said. "The rationale behind it is that when we got into this, we thought we could work with The Harbor or Totten Trail if we brought in (liquor) for events. We tried to do a fundraiser for Pheas-

ants Forever, and the Attorney General's office shut us down because they can't transfer the license to us because we are an existing licensed facility."

As they renew the license, Albrecht said that he'd like to add an on-sale only.

Albrecht said the winery missed out on hosting at least three events in 2025 because they couldn't serve liquor.

"We really don't want to get into (selling) liquor. It's just for events," Albrecht said. "We have a bar down the street for that."

The council approved the

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Santa's elves are working hard to keep up with Christmas orders!

Please place orders by Friday, Nov. 28, 2025

Orders taken after Nov. 28th will not be guaranteed before Christmas, but we'll do our best!



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