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## White Lake addition named top '12 story

Dec. 31, 2012

The completion of the White Lake Recreation Center, a project some likened to an “extreme community makeover,” highlighted events in the Antigo area during 2012.

The Antigo Daily Journal editorial staff made the decision after pouring through thousands of pages of newsprint in preparing the annual year-end edition included with today's newspaper.

There were certainly other contenders, but White Lake emerged the clear winner based on the long-term effects on the small eastern Langlade County community and, frankly, the “feel-good” attitude the entire project created across the northwoods.

The opening of Langlade Hospital was ranked second among staffers, largely due to the ongoing nature of the project, and the defeat of the Antigo school district's elementary referendum, third.

Laker pride

To the strains of Journey's “Don't Stop Believing,” the White Lake school district inaugurated its new gymnasium and recreation center on Nov. 19, just over a year after voters approved a \$3 million referendum to finance the work.

District officials had vowed following the successful November, 2011 referendum that the new recreation center and gymnasium would be ready for the first Laker home basketball game, and they easily made the deadline after an unprecedented year of work that shined a positive light on the school and entire community.

During the program, speakers stressed the qualities that made White Lake so special, ranging from the willingness of the community to ante up for students during an era where referendums in much larger and more prosperous areas routinely fail to landowners providing the logs and the local Robbins Flooring the expertise to create perhaps the finest gymnasium court in the region.

“White Lake, you showed them how to do it right,” Dan Wickersheim and Beth Castaldi representing the Community Advisory Task Force, said, stressing what a privilege it was to be a member of a community “willing to invest in our kids.”

One year and 11 days after referendum voters resoundingly said yes to improved facilities, the White Lake school district held a grand opening ceremony for its new recreation center.

The project—which may have seemed improbable to some considering the obstacles facing tiny school districts—was approved by 60 percent of voters who said yes to a \$3 million referendum question on Nov. 8, 2011.

Since that time, the other 40 percent of the community—or at least the vast majority of them—have likely been won over as well, catching the enthusiasm of the school staff, contractors and community at-large.

The project, with a total price tag of \$3.58 million, included a central recreational center, similar to a commons, an exercise room that may be used as a community space, men's and women's locker rooms and restrooms, team locker rooms, concession area as well as the stunning new gymnasium.

The project also included remodeling of existing classrooms and locker spaces into a new technical education area.

The school's tiny vintage gymnasium has also been retained.

Langlade Hospital opens

The opening of Langlade Hospital was relegated to second place in this year's voting, simple due to the ongoing nature of the project, which has spanned several years. It almost assured will be among the top three again in 12 months.

Joined by Canadian representatives of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph and health care dignitaries from across the region, Langlade Hospital officials clipped the ribbon marking the grand opening of its new facility on Nov. 16.

The ceremony, the culmination of two years of planning and construction, drew an overflow crowd for an outside ceremony, followed by remarks in the hospital conference room and a Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert Morneau.

It was a true celebration but the seriousness of the hospital's mission, dating to the opening of the original facility in 1933, provided a continuing undercurrent.

The hospital actually opened in May and while all of the services were available, aesthetics including the main entrance could not be completed because the towering and idled older medical building was in the way.

After about two months of torrid work, that four-level structure was cleared and work started to complete the new facility. The entrance was built, excavation and filling of the site of the former hospital was launched and other projects, including additions to the Aspirus General Clinic and enclosing the former walkway to the St. Joseph Outpatient Center were initiated.

Plans for construction of the new Langlade Hospital were announced in March, 2010, but preliminary work had been underway for months.

By the time ground was broken eight months later, dozens and dozens of hospital personnel had been involved in the design, offering input on everything from where sinks were located to the placement of light fixtures.

The result is a true community collaboration, the speakers stressed, and a model that will be used by other health care facilities as they map their future.

Even as the ribbon was clipped, work was continuing on the hospital's next projects, a major renovation and addition to the adjoining General Clinic and construction of the new Center for Health and Performance, which is slated to open in May.

#### Referendum defeat

While first and second place in this year's voting were dominated by truly "good news" events, the defeat of the Antigo school district's elementary building referendum in November carried a very mixed message.

By a 59 percent to 41 percent margin, voters in the district rejected a proposal to construct a new central elementary school and close all seven current facilities. It marked the third time the plan has gone down in defeat.

The result came as a disappointment to new school supporters but those in favor of keeping the rural elementary schools operating celebrated and pushed hard to jet the board to change an earlier vote that called for consolidation to proceed regardless of the referendum's outcome.

That faction was successful when weeks later, the board nixed scheduled plans to close the Crestwood, Spring Valley, Pleasant View and Mattoon elementary schools at the end of the present school year. Instead the issue will be studied, again, by an ad hoc committee with recommendations in summer.