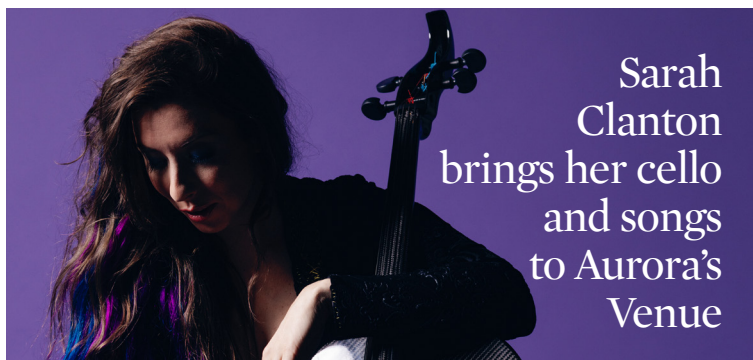




WEEKEND INSIDE

A cappella group Whiffenpoofs stops in Northbrook

Terisa Griffin to perform at Freedom Hall



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\$2.00 FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024 AURORABEACONNEWS.COM

Rebate program proposal backed

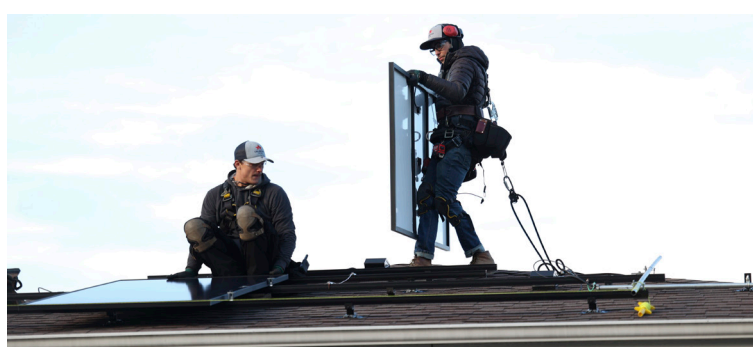
Aurora committee agrees with assistance for addition of solar panels to homes

By Steve Lord
Beacon-News

An Aurora City Council committee this week backed a program proposed by Ald. John Laesch to subsidize people looking to add solar panels to their houses. Laesch, at large, told members of the Rules, Administration and Procedures Committee on Tues-

day he wants to put \$15,000 of his yearly \$20,000 allotment of ward funds toward the program. The program would provide a subsidy of up to \$1,000 for an installation of five solar panels or more, and up to \$3,000 for multi-roof townhomes. It also would provide up to \$500 for an EV charging station install. Laesch said he would review all

the applicants, looking to see if a proposal is a good candidate for solar or not — for instance, if the applicant has a roof shielded by heavy tree growth, or one that is not positioned correctly. “Otherwise, it would be on a first-come, first-serve basis,” he said. He said because the program “is more of a pilot program,” he will see what kind of interest he gets. The applicant would have to be a resident in good standing with the



Jared Salvatore, left, prepares a bracket for installation as Garrison Riegel of Celestar Solar positions a solar panel on a roof in Schaumburg in November. TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

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East Aurora School District Superintendent Jennifer Norrell examines some of the high-end appliances in the kitchen to be used for culinary classes in the district's new Resilience Education Center. DENISE CROSBY/BEACON-NEWS

Kendall given \$15 million for project

Grant will help county expand broadband internet access to more residents

By Steve Lord
Beacon-News

Kendall County will get \$15 million from the Illinois Office of Broadband to help expand high-speed internet access in the county. County officials announced Wednesday that with the grant award, the county intends to develop a public-private partnership that will result in more than \$40 million in investment in a community-owned broadband network. The network will provide broadband access to portions of the county not currently served by high-speed internet, allow for an expanded public safety communication network, provide the most cost-effective access to other government agencies and support economic development, a county press release said. “What we aim to achieve in this community-owned infrastructure project is a holistic solution that connects those currently under- and unserved while also making strides towards the future development of our community, such as priming key areas for economic development and bolstering emergency communication,” said Zach Bachmann, Kendall County Board member and chair of the Connect Kendall County Commission. “We believe this is the best way we can bridge our digital divide.” More than 1,900 homes in Kendall County are considered unserved or underserved with

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THE PLACE TO BE

With ‘The REC,’ East Aurora creates new facility students definitely will want to enter



Denise Crosby

“Impressive” is one way to describe East Aurora School District’s new Resilience Educa-

tion Center that officially opened Wednesday on the site of its former old and shabby service building at 417 Fifth St. in Aurora to address the mental health and social wellness of those it serves. But even that word doesn’t quite do justice to what is inside this 30,000-square-foot learning center that will likely be known simply as “The REC.” If that name sounds cool,

well, that’s really the whole idea behind this \$18 million project that was funded with federal money given to school districts to help weather the negative effects that the pandemic had on students. Rather than put the money into staffing and programs that would come to an end when the federal pandemic funding expires later this year, East Aurora decided to

build a center that, as East Aurora School District Superintendent Jennifer Norrell told me, “would be here long after we are gone.” But in order to achieve the goal of this project — mitigating trauma and building resiliency — when this vision was not much more than ideas on a dry-erase board, she and her cabinet

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North Aurora turkey ‘mascot’ Randi dies after being struck by vehicle

By David Sharos
Chicago Tribune

Village officials in North Aurora were saddened to learn last week that a wild turkey known as Randi — who had become a local attraction and a “mascot of sorts” — was killed around midmorning March 15 while crossing Randall Road near its intersection with Mooseheart Road/Orchard Road. A little more than a month ago, the village’s Public Works Depart-

ment installed a crossing sign near the site with a silhouette of a turkey and the words “Wild Turkey Xing” to alert motorists of the habits of the wild turkey who moved into the area many months ago. Village President Mark Gaffino brought up the idea of putting up the sign at a village board meeting on Feb. 5 and expressed regret that the bird lost her life barely over a month after the warning sign had been installed. “The turkey that had been

named Randi because she was always seen around Randall Road was hit by a vehicle around 9:30 last Friday morning,” Gaffino said on Tuesday. “Our local police reported it to me through an email.” He said people saw the dead turkey and that it was taken off the road. “The police sent out the community service department to pick her up,” he said.

Turn to Randi, Page 2



North Aurora installed a sign to warn drivers about a local wild turkey that often crossed Randall Road near its intersection with Mooseheart Road/ Orchard Road. The turkey recently was killed. VILLAGE OF NORTH AURORA



Broadband

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internet access. In 2022, the county began assessing ways to bridge this gap, officials said.

The Connect Kendall County Commission was established in 2023 by the Kendall County Board to study connectivity and ways to deliver high-speed internet across the county.

The commission issued a request for proposals for a partner in constructing a middle-mile ring of broadband fiber for the project. The county selected Pivot-Tech, a fiber and wireless development company, based on its vision and project area expertise, officials said.

“This project leverages federal funds available for broadband connection to benefit the residents and businesses of the county,”

Matt Kellogg, Kendall County Board chair, said. “This county-owned asset will support the needs of nearly everyone across the county and beyond.”

As part of the public-private partnership, Pivot-Tech plans to bring more than \$25 million in additional private capital and project-based revenue bonds to finance the project, according to officials.

Kendall County intends to enter into a concession agreement for the finance, development, construction and operation of the broadband network for an extended term, according to officials.

The county would be a stakeholder in the network’s development and operation and receive a portion of the project’s profits, officials said. The project is expected to begin in the fall.

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The dance studio in East Aurora School District’s new Resilience Education Center features a mirrored wall and specialized flooring. DENISE CROSBY/BEACON-NEWS PHOTOS

BRIDGE

North-South vulnerable, South deals

North

♠ A Q
♥ 7 6 5 4 3
♦ 8 7
♣ A 5 4 2

West

♠ 9 8 7 6 4 3 2
♥ K
♦ K 6 4
♣ Q 8

East

♠ K J
♥ 10 9 8 2
♦ 10 5 3
♣ K 10 9 7

South

♠ 10 5
♥ A Q J
♦ A Q J 9 2
♣ J 6 3

Today’s deal is from a recent team match in Australia. At this table, West threw in a cocktail-hour pre-empt. North had an easy bid and the normal contract was reached. South played dummy’s queen on the opening spade lead and lost to East’s king. East led back a spade, clearing the suit. South won in dummy and led a diamond to his queen. West won and cashed five more spade tricks for down three. Minus 300 looked to be an ugly result.

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
INT	3♠	3NT	All pass

Opening lead: Eight of ♠

At the other table, West did not bid and the same contract was reached. West led the nine of spades, denying the 10, and dummy’s queen lost to the king. East knew that South had the 10 of spades and thought it would hold up as a second stopper, so East shifted to the 10 of clubs. South and West played low and dummy’s ace won the trick. A diamond to the queen lost and West led a spade, clearing the suit. In dummy for the last time and still needing tricks, South led a heart to his queen, losing to the king. West cashed five spades and South had impossible discarding problems. The end result was 11 tricks for the defense. Down seven for 700 points to East-West! North-South at the first table were seen in the bar after the game, bragging about holding this deal to down three.

— Bob Jones
Tribune Content Agency

Facility

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decided it “had to be a place where kids would want to come.” So they asked a bunch of their middle and secondary students what would it take to get them to put down their phones and walk through these doors.

Which brings me back to the words impressive and yes, cool.

There are, of course, private group and individual counseling rooms that will be run by highly-trained professionals from universities. But because there’s so much more going on in this expansive state-of-the-art center, it would be hard to know who is coming through its doors for clinical therapy and who is coming for less direct ways of bolstering mental health wellness — and resiliency.

Like after-school tutoring in one of the many study rooms. Or dance and yoga in a spacious studio that features mirrored and windowed walls as well as cushioned flooring.

Or culinary lessons in the high-end kitchen that includes a Sub-Zero fridge and built-in microwaves. Or 2-D and 3-D art classes in a space that not only has pottery wheels but a separate kiln room.

Or gaming and/or coding (an IHSA-sanctioned activity) in the E-sports Center.

Or track-laying in the music production studio. Or creating a newscast in the broadcast TV recording studio. Or making a podcast in a separate sound room.

Or after finishing a few of these elective classes, enjoying a fresh smoothie or veggie wrap or individual pizza in the cafe/coffee bar. There’s even a large two-story open area that features padded stadium seating (with charging stations) for theatrical performances, lectures or just to hang out, as Norrell says, “in the hottest seat in town.”

Like I said, cool. The Resilience Education Center “is one of those things you envision, and rarely does it come out as you thought,” East Aurora



Top: Kevin Jenkins, safety and security manager for East Aurora School District, works at one of the gaming stations in the E-sports Center of the district’s new Resilience Education Center.

Above: An employee with Sodexo Food Service works behind the counter of the coffee bar prior to the ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday.

Superintendent of Operations Steve Megazzini said. “But this is pretty close.”

More than 100 community leaders and other guests got a chance to see that for themselves at the official ribbon cutting held Wednesday evening. And on Thursday, East Aurora School District 131 staff was able to also tour the center. But it’s the kids “I can’t wait to get in here,” said Norrell, noting that the district will go to 90-minute block classes next year, with students shuttled by bus from their schools to the center and staff rotating in and out.

What makes her even more excited is how this building will be used by so many in School District 131. High school juniors and seniors will take part in the advanced industry level electives, while seventh through 10th graders can attend after-school activities hosted by staff and other community partners.

Not only will The REC be a place where students can come for classes, tutoring, summer camps or meetings, it will also be available for families, including those with small children who can take advantage of its weekend and night programs designed to

foster healthy preschool development. In other words, said Norrell, “a space where everyone would want to enter.”

As I had expected, “the community was blown away” by the building and the resources that will be offered at The REC, confirmed East Aurora School Board President Annette Johnson when we spoke Thursday afternoon.

“These kids are not only getting a cool center to go to but it will provide training for futuristic jobs. And that’s a win-win for the community,” she said.

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Rebate

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city, or a city-based business. All permits would have to be acquired through the city, and if necessary, Historic District approval would be needed.

A licensed Illinois electrician would be needed, one that has an apprenticeship

program, as required by state law.

Laesch added he intends to work with the statewide Citizens Utility Board, or CUB, to do the program, although any homeowner who goes on their own would be eligible to apply, too.

Marina Minic, solar program coordinator for CUB, said the organization

that advocates for citizen utility customers has been running a program since 2019.

With CUB, residents have a chance to do a solar group buy in which participants pool their buying power to secure discounts to make installing solar more affordable, Minic said.

Laesch pointed out that State Solar Renewable

Energy Credits can cover as much as 30% to 40% of the installation cost of solar, and there is a 30% federal tax credit.

Utility Net Metering credits help pay back a system faster, he said. Also, in Illinois, homeowners associations cannot block solar installations.

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Randi

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Gaffino said many people had reported seeing Randi over the past several months and there were a number of Facebook postings about the turkey.

“Randi cut across the road many times over the past six months and she became sort of a mascot of sorts,” Gaffino said. “Last fall was when she really

started to gain some notoriety as more local people learned about her. It was a wild animal and so I guess something like this was inevitable, but I still feel bad about it. I’m an animal person myself and it was sad that this happened.”

The recently erected turkey crossing sign which cost the village \$272 remains on the east side of northbound Randall Road. Officials knew the sign might not be perma-

nent since the turkey, if it survived, might have chosen to migrate somewhere else.

Gaffino said at the present time, he has no information regarding the sign’s future. Earlier this month, Gaffino acknowledged the sign would likely be removed eventually once Randi left the scene, and if there were no more wild turkeys seen in the area.

“I have informally mentioned to some people that maybe we could take

the sign down but have some kind of memorial for Randi put in its place,” Gaffino said. “Maybe we’ll do something different but I’m not sure where we’ll go from here. This was something we did for fun and didn’t affect anyone negatively in the village. My guess is we won’t leave the sign up but maybe there will be some kind of remembrance.”

David Sharos is a freelance reporter.

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