

2005
YEAR IN REVIEW

Editor's note: This is one in a series of stories revisiting some of the people Pioneer Press readers met in the past year. The newspaper checked back with seven people on Sunday and will continue with stories each day through the end of the year.

Croatian
presidential
contender
fights on

North Oaks man says
he's succeeding
despite 'politics'

It has been a year of highs and lows for Boris Miksic.

A year ago Monday, the North Oaks businessman came within 2 percentage points of making the presidential runoff in his native country, Croatia. Accusations of voting fraud flew, as did counterclaims of inflated campaign promises from the American Croat.



Boris Miksic

Now things are looking up. In May, he and two supporters won seats in the assembly of Zagreb, the nation's capital city. Slowly, his reputation is recovering from claims that he wasn't a true Croatian anymore and that his White Bear Township-based company, Cortec, was n't as big as he had boasted.

"I think the worst part is behind me," he said. "They don't view me as an American, but as one of their own who just happened to have lived a good part of their life in the United States."

Construction will soon begin on a new airport for Zagreb, one of his campaign promises, and Miksic is turning his attention to improving public transportation and the country's shipping ports.

Plans are shaping up for another of his goals: a Cortec plant in Croatia. The plant, scheduled to open in June, will employ 50 people initially. A plant in China is planned for later in the year.

"In spite of politics, we're succeeding," he said.

The man who made a name for himself as an independent expects this year to form the Fight for Croatia party, a play on his surname, which means "fight" in Croatian, Miksic said.

He has begun handing out 25,000 copies of a new book, the title of which loosely translates to "the real winner of the presidential elections." He campaigned for president with his first book, a rags to riches tale, and he admits that he's not giving up on the big prize. "I want to show them that Boris Miksic delivers what he promises."

— Mary Bauer

FOREST LAKE

Group sues to stop
housing project

BY MEGAN BOLDT
Pioneer Press

The battle over a controversial affordable housing project in Forest Lake got more complicated Wednesday, when a citizens group that opposes the complex filed a lawsuit against the city and the board that owns the old hospital site proposed for the project.

The Forest Lake Community Association is asking a Washington County District judge to temporarily block the sale of the District Memorial Hospital site and void two purchase agreements signed by Fairview Health Services, which leases the property.

It also wants the city to overturn its decision to rezone the hospital site to allow high-density mixed residential use and deny any building permits or applications for the site.

Forest Lake resident Richard Pecar said a large amount of donations, volunteer time and taxpayer dollars were used to build the hospital, so the association wants to make sure the land is used only for projects that serve a broad section of the community.

"The community has a substantial amount of equity in this. People feel invested in the site," Pecar said. "If the association gets its way, that land, every square inch, would remain public property."

David Hebert, the city's attorney, said Wednesday that it's too early to comment on the suit.

"It's going to take time to review it," he said.

This is the second lawsuit filed against the city in less than a month over the project.

Minnetonka developer John Duffy struck a deal to buy the land and teamed up with Human Services Inc. of Oakdale to propose building Forest Ridge Apartments, a three-story, 48-unit apartment building on the site.

Families earning \$22,000 to \$50,000 a year would occupy 41 of those units. The rest would be for homeless single parents recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and their families. The parents also would participate in a program to develop job skills.

Some residents complained about the proposal, claiming the complex would increase crime and lower property values.

The Forest Lake City Council rejected the plan, and Duffy and Human Services sued the city Dec. 5, claiming the council illegally nixed the project because it didn't want low-income housing in that part of town, even though such a facility meets city requirements.

City officials have disputed the claims, saying covenants attached to the former hospital prevent housing being built on the site.

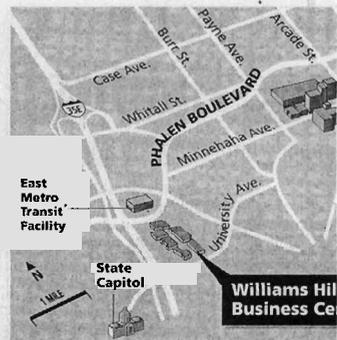
The citizens group claims in its suit that Fairview's lease only allows it to use the facility for medical or health care purposes.

It also argues Fairview's lease with the hospital district should be null and void, because it entered into purchase agreements with the developer for nonmedical use.

Pecar said members of the association feel it's sad and unfortunate the situation had to come to this.

"We're not pleased with the fact that we had to sue," he said. "We tried to do everything we could to do work with the hospital district and the city to make sure this land stayed in the public's hands."

CONTINUED FROM



Hill pollutant

(continued)

will make a big dent" in the contamination levels, said Karen Kromar, a project manager with the MPCA.

In large doses, the chemicals, which include xylene, trichloroethane and vinyl chloride, can cause liver and kidney problems, as well as cancer. But since businesses in the area use municipal water, there is little chance of human exposure.

"There is no risk to the public at this point," Kromar said.

Predicting the flow of groundwater is tricky, but the underground Trout Brook stream flows near the area and empties into the Mississippi. A spokesman for the Port Authority — which is not responsible for the original contamination — said that is part of the concern.

Neighbors did not seem worried. "We've had a good relationship with the port," said Ken Cooper, executive director of the

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ST. PAUL

Man in wreck had been stabbed

A man who was apparently driving himself to get medical help after being stabbed crashed into another vehicle in downtown St. Paul on Wednesday, leading to a chain-reaction accident that injured two other people.

The crash happened at about 11 a.m. on the exit ramp from U.S. 52 to East Seventh Street. Paramedics and police officers responding to the wreck found a 41-year-old St. Paul man with injuries inconsistent with a car accident, said St. Paul police spokesman Pete Crum.

The man was taken to Regions Hospital, underwent surgery and was in critical

condition, Crum said. It appeared that he had been stabbed, though the assault probably didn't happen immediately prior to the crash, Crum said.

The man's van grinded against a median wall and rear-ended a pickup truck, said Kevin Smith, Minnesota State Patrol spokesman.

"The man was obviously in distress, which was probably what caused him to drive that way," Smith said.

Police did not release the victim's name.

Two people in one of the vehicles were taken to United Hospital with non-life-threatening injuries; the two other

drivers were uninjured, Crum said.

The State Patrol is investigating the accident and St. Paul police is investigating the assault.

Police ask anyone with information about the stabbing to call the homicide unit, which investigates aggravated assaults, at 651-266-5650.

— Mara H. Gottfried



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