

Austin Post-Bulletin

Busy day

Spring sports in full swing
» **B1**



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2012

Online at www.AustinPB.com | 50¢



Leveling the playing field
A look at girls in sports
» **Inside today**



Great expectations
Kindergarten is more than your ABCs » **A3**

Not this year
Dayton predicts 2013 will be stadium's year
» **A4**



P-B to file complaint against HRA

By **Heather Rule**
hrule@postbulletin.com
(507) 434-7344

The Austin Post-Bulletin plans to file a complaint with the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of the city of Austin regarding what it believes is a violation of the Minnesota Open Meeting Law.

The alleged violation occurred when HRA Executive Director Jim Hurm called each HRA board member to discuss a change in HRA leadership. Specifically, Hurm discussed City Engineer Jon Erichson stepping in as HRA executive director when Erichson retires.



Hurm

Hurm says he followed the law and did not violate it.

The Minnesota Open Meeting Law requires that meetings of governing bodies generally be open to the public. Communication about official business through telephone conversations — called serial meetings — would violate the law.

Hurm presented the information regarding the future of the HRA executive director position at an Austin City Council work session April 2. The information had not been discussed at an open, public HRA meeting. The HRA provides affordable, decent and safe housing to low-income individuals or families through subsidized programs.

Minnesota Newspaper Association attorney Mark Anfinson said the violation seems "clear cut."

"If there was any back-and-forth, any effort to get their approval or to get their input

or to get their suggestions," Anfinson said. "Anything like that. That would be a clear-cut violation of the Open Meeting Law."

Anfinson said it would have been fine if Hurm had called each board member and told them he didn't want them to respond, he was just calling for informational purposes to tell them something and the conversation ended without a response from the board members.

Hurm said that is what he did.

"I wasn't trying to convince them of anything," Hurm said. "This whole thing is just courtesy. And there was no real discussion."

"I just simply informed them that I was going to bring this up at the city council meeting."

HRA board member Marilyn Prenosil disputes Hurm's claim that the calling was purely informational.

"He wanted to know what my opinion was," Prenosil said. "And I told him I'd have to think about it."

She said she also asked Hurm if he was calling other HRA board members. When he said he was, Prenosil said she questioned him about the open meeting law. Hurm told her it was all right because no decisions were being made, Prenosil said.

In Hurm's phone call to HRA board chairman Marvin Repinski, Hurm shared the information and mentioned Erichson's name but, according to Repinski, Hurm did not mention that he would be presenting it to the city council.

"He never mentioned that," Repinski said. "I was really surprised that he did, and that's what infuriated me."

AustinPB.com
Related weblinks

Wind whips up smiles



Photos by **Elizabeth Nida Obert** / enida@postbulletin.com
Above: Teagen Nash, of Austin, plays at East Side Lake Park in Austin on Tuesday.

At right: "The wind is getting a little rough," says Christine Barinka, of Austin, right, who co-manages the Austin boys tennis team with Jenna Svoboda, left, at a match against Rochester Mayo on Tuesday in Austin.



United Way passes \$1 million goal

By **Jim Troyer**
news@postbulletin.com

United Way of Mower County did it again.

Vice President Paul Kuehne told a jovial audience in the George Room of the Hormel Historic Home on Tuesday night that the 2011 fund drive had passed the \$1 million mark for the second year in a row. The 2011 figure was \$1,040,000, which provides \$780,000 for 2012 community grants. The 2010 figure was \$1,029,329.

The campaign's Big Three fundraisers — Hormel Foods corporate office, the Hormel plant and Quality Pork Processors — led the charge.

The 2011 report lists 14 busi-

nesses and groups that have contributed between \$500 and \$249,000 for the past five years. Another 115 individuals or families gave from \$500 to \$10,000 or more.

Executive Director Mandi Lighthizer-Schmidt said United Way this year provided 61 preschool scholarships in Lyle, LeRoy, Grand Meadow, Adams and Austin.

United Way funds programs that boost the community ranging from Special Olympics to the American Red Cross.

If the news of generous contributions and hard-working volunteers put the group in a party mood, guest speaker Sheila Berger, Sumner Element-

ary School principal, soon had them sitting up in their seats.

"The United States ranks highest in poverty of all the industrial countries of the world," she said.

At Sumner, 75 percent of the students qualify for free lunches, meaning they're below the poverty line.

Berger said that in Mower County, 14.3 percent of families live below the poverty line. In some, children become caregivers for other children.

"When a fourth-grader comes home to take care of his third-grade brother, feeds and changes two babies and puts them to bed before he can go to bed himself, then where does homework go?" she asks.

Berger praised Sumner's partnership with United Way, which includes a "backpack program."

Teachers at Sumner noticed that some students were hungry when they came back to school on Mondays. Their last meal had been at school on Friday. Now on Friday, those students leave with a backpack of easy-to-prepare foods.

Berger is optimistic. Scores are going up she noted. In fall, 83 percent of new students needed help with phonics, but within 12 weeks, the figure fell to 7 percent.

"If you give them the basic needs and offer them experiences, they can blossom."

Timberwolves group honors Austin couple

By **Kay Fate**
kfate@postbulletin.com
(507) 434-7343

An Austin couple was honored by the Minnesota Timberwolves FastBreak Foundation for their commitment to the environment.

Jim and Merlene Stiles were recognized on the court during a recent Timberwolves game as part of Think Green Month, in which the foundation focuses on organizations and individuals helping preserve and improve the environment.

Jim Stiles is president of the Austin Izaak Walton League, which is involved with conservation efforts in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, as well as

FastBreak Foundation

The Timberwolves FastBreak Foundation supports hands-on programs that positively affect youth. Through giving, education and basketball opportunities, it enables youths to make responsible decisions, contribute to their futures and experience lifelong memories.

the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge, the Richard J. Dorer Memorial

Hardwood State Forest and many others.

"We protect and enhance and make sure those areas are there for everybody to enjoy," Stiles said.

Merlene Stiles is president of the Austin Audubon Society.

"The Izaak Walton League, along with the Audubon groups and many other groups, are part of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership," which involves more than 80 non-profit groups, she said.

Together, their coalition members and supporters work for clean energy, clean water and investments in Minnesota's outdoors through policy initiatives, public education

and community events.

"Everybody enjoys Minnesota's outdoors," Jim said. "We get people who want to live here and vacation here, and it's because we value our lakes and outdoor areas."

Timberwolves team President Chris Wright presented the Stilesees with an autographed team print.

"It's so fun," Merlene Stiles said. "We volunteer because we love it, but to be recognized is just amazing."

Her husband agreed.

"I really didn't know what to expect, so going out on the court was really neat," he said. "A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I'm sure."



Submitted photo

Merlene and Jim Stiles, center, were honored recently by the Minnesota Timberwolves FastBreak Foundation for their commitment to the environment. Presenting the award is team President Chris Wright, left.

Inside

Calendar A2 Lotteries..... A2
Classified..... B4 Opinions A5
Comics..... B3 Puzzles B2
Crossword..... B2 Sports B1

Obituaries A2

Elizabeth Baker, Albert Lea
Joann Bliese, Tucson, Ariz.
Leon Johnson, Austin
Saleem Magriby Jr., Rochester
Kenneth Mork, Rochester

Weather A6

Thursday

51
36 6 a.m. Noon 6 p.m.
42° 49° 50°

Corrections

The Post-Bulletin is committed to fairness and accuracy. If you have a concern, contact Managing Editor Jay Furst at 285-7742 or furst@postbulletin.com.

Contact us

Newsroom, delivery, advertising (507) 434-7340
Email austin@postbulletin.com
In person 201 S. Main St., Austin, MN 55912
Connect with us on **Facebook** and **Twitter**

Punchline A2

"Yes, but your husband's an antique dealer."

Page edited and designed by
Nikki Merfeld Ruble / nruble@postbulletin.com

Austin, Minnesota
Volume 87, No. 93
12 pages

© 2012 Post-Bulletin Company, LLC
All rights reserved

