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'It was just thick smoke'

Couple recalls blaze that claimed their home and pets

By **Heather Rule**
 Daily Journal

Eighty-two-year-old Norma Lee was upstairs in the bedroom of her rural Battle Lake home when the fire broke out at about 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. Her husband was downstairs. "The smoke alarms went off," said Robert Lee, 85. Pretty soon, he told his wife to call 911.

Norma, who has been in a wheelchair for about a year, said it's difficult to move through the doorways to get to safety, but she "made it in a hurry."

Before Tuesday night, Norma always heard about other people who lost their homes to fires and tried to imagine how those people felt. And she always hoped she would never have to find out.

"You don't really know until it happens," she said.



Heather Rule/Daily Journal

Robert and Norma Lee, sitting in their daughter's home, lost their Battle Lake home to a fire earlier this week. Their dog and cat perished in the blaze. Though Norma said she "can't live without a dog," they probably won't get another one.

While Norma and Robert made it out safely, the fire destroyed their home, in the 39100 block of County Hwy. 16, and claimed the

lives of their dog and cat.

"Couldn't believe something like that could happen so fast," Robert said. "After

awhile, maybe we'll feel better."

They were prepared, though. Norma remained calm and didn't panic, recalling the plan she had in place. Awhile back, her husband asked her what she would do if there was a fire in the house.

"I sort of had a plan in my mind," Norma said. "I think everybody should have a plan set up."

As the fire spread downstairs, thick smoke started to come up through the vents. The cause of the fire remains under investigation but is believed to have originated near the wood stove or chimney in the basement, according to a news release from the Otter Tail County Sheriff's Department.

"I didn't see flames," Norma said. "It was just thick smoke."

Help from a nearby source

Less than two miles from the Lee home, Mark Christensen was at his house when he heard the fire call. The volunteer firefighter bypassed the Battle Lake Fire Station, grabbed a couple fire extinguishers and went right over to the burning house,

See **Fire** — Page 3

Bow lessons



Rian Bosse/Daily Journal
 Fourth-grader William Maanum aims a bow and arrow Friday morning as the fourth grade prairie science class practiced its archery at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center.



Fourth-graders learning about various naturalists, practice archery

Rian Bosse/Daily Journal

The fourth-grade prairie science class takes aim Friday morning at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. The class has been learning about famous naturalists and, after a lesson on famous archer Fred Bear, learned how to use a bow.

What's Happening?

A whole lot of 'Razzle Dazzle'

By **Chris Reinos**
 Daily Journal

A Center For The Arts' annual spring fundraiser is set for this weekend, and organizers are hoping to leave the audience singing.

There will be three performances of the Razzle Dazzle Revue, with one each on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The event features local talent in musical variety performances.

This year's theme for the revue is "Leave Them Singing." Tickets are \$16 for adults and \$6 for students. For more information, call A Center For The Arts at 218-998-2787.

See **Events** — Page 3

Otter swimmer signs with UND

By **Zach Stich**
 Daily Journal

After a stellar senior season that saw a first place finish in 100 freestyle, second place in the 200 freestyle, All-American consideration time, a second place finish as a member of the 200 medley relay team and a third place team finish, Fergus Falls swimmer Cal Mouritsen has signed to swim for the University of North Dakota.

Mouritsen has been an integral part of the Otter boys swim team since his freshman year when Fergus Falls claimed the Class A



Mouritsen

See **Mouritsen** — Page 9

Rep. Nornes: 'It's just a poor way to do business'

Minnesota House passes bill to spend \$322M of surplus

By **Chris Reinos** and wire services

After more than nine hours of fiercely partisan debate Thursday night, the Minnesota House passed a bill spending money to boost wages for caregivers for the elderly and disabled, guarantee hot lunches for

low-income students, fill potholes and expand broadband access in rural areas.

Rep. Bud Nornes voted against the bill based on his concerns with the amount of spending included in it. While Nornes supports a few of the individual pieces of the bill, including a funding increase for nursing homes and pothole repairs, the overall price was too high for his taste.

"Everything including the kitchen sink gets thrown in there," Nornes said. "It's

just a poor way to do business."

The measure allocates \$322 million of the state's \$1.2 billion budget surplus for what House Speaker Paul Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis, called "things that (Minnesotans) treasure — schools, caregivers, broadband, economic development, jobs and transportation."

See **Budget** — Page 2

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PRECIPITATION: .02

OBITUARIES
 In today's Journal, **Page 2**
 • Laverne Johnson, 83, Barrett
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