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# ACCESS PRESS

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## Be prepared with winter's chilly arrival

The arrival of winter weather in Minnesota means it's time to act and have our needs met. Some of us might remember sitting around the radio or TV on winter mornings, listening for school to be canceled. Today's weather information is relayed through numerous phone alerts and apps, helping everyone track changing weather conditions, approaching storms and local snow emergencies. Have a plan to get timely information.

### Sidewalk safety

Getting around after snowy weather can be challenging, especially for people with disabilities who don't drive. The fear of falling and sustaining serious or fatal injuries because someone didn't clear snow and ice from sidewalks, steps or curb ramps is all too real.

Most communities have a set time limit for when snow and ice must be removed from sidewalks and curb ramps, so check websites to see what the rules are in a particular community. The clock usually starts ticking when the snow or sleet stop falling, with a 24 to 48-hour time limit. Fines can be assessed to those who don't clear paths in a timely manner and violators should be reported. Communities typically put this information on their websites.

People with disabilities can contact Disability Hub to ask about snow removal resources. Elders can check with the Senior Linkage Line. Be aware there may be costs associated with snow removal referrals.

In St. Paul, a group of volunteers called the Saintry City Snow Angels can help people with disabilities with free snow removal. The group is in need of volunteers. Contact the group through Facebook, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/108305797824732>

Other cities may have block nurse groups or community services groups that can provide snow removal help.

Salt, sand, clay cat litter or deicers should be kept on hand for home sidewalks, ramps and steps. Some cities give away sand but it must be picked up at a public works facility.

### Energy assistance available

Rising energy bills on top of other soaring household costs are causing stress for many households. Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule is a state law that protects residential utility customers from having electric or natural gas service shut off between October 1 and April 30. To protect service from disconnection, consumers must make and keep up with a payment plan that the utility agrees to.

A payment plan can be set up at any time the Cold Weather Rule is in effect. Protection under the rule is available to home owners and to renters who pay their own heating utilities.

All natural gas and electric utilities must offer protection under the Cold Weather Rule. The rule doesn't apply to delivered fuels; oil and propane or wood. But if a furnace that operates on delivered

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Laura Baker Millis and Laura Baker

## Laura Baker's namesake school left a long-lasting legacy

Much has changed since 1897, when the words "nervous" and "backward" were used to describe children with disabilities. The Laura Baker Services Association (LBSA), one of Minnesota's oldest disability service organizations, is celebrating its 125th year at its annual gala is December 3.

The association has grown into a diverse

nonprofit, helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities lead meaningful and productive lives. It has continued its commitment to education while offering many other services to children and adults with disabilities in the Northfield area. That includes education

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## Changes afoot at Minnesota Legislature, cabinet

by Jane McClure

Lots of new faces and familiar faces in new roles will greet self-advocates when the Minnesota Legislature convenes in January. With DFL majorities entering both the House and Senate, and the re-election of DFL Gov. Tim Walz, it's the first time since 2014 that one party has controlled at three branches of state government. But the majorities are slim and with years of pent-up demand for program and spending asks, anything could happen.

Change afoot at four state departments is also being eyed. A big loss for Minnesotans with disabilities is Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm's decision to not seek reappointment. Malcolm's legacy include years of service to Minnesotans with disabilities.

The November 8 election triggered a flurry of activity for disability advocacy groups and self-advocates. Many are hurrying to get bill language in before the Christmas holidays.

Before the election, the Minnesota Legislature was already facing its greatest turnover since 1972.

While many disability-focused bills for past years are being brought back in 2023, not all bill authors are returning. There's also the wait to find out if there will be changes in House and Senate committee structures, and committee leadership.



Jan Malcolm

There are also the numbers games with House and Senate membership. The Senate flipped from Republican to DFL control, but only by a 34-33 margin. In the House, the DFL margin went from 71-63 to 70-64.

Leadership changes were announced right after the election. Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) returns as House speaker designee. Rep. Jamie Long (DFL Minneapolis) is tabbed to be majority leader.

Rep. Lisa DeMuth (R-Cold Spring) will be the new minority leader.

### NEWS DIGEST



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The incoming Senate majority leader is Sen. Kari Dziedzic (DFL-Minneapolis). Sen. Bobby Joe Champion, another Minneapolis DFLer, will be president of the Senate. Sen John Marty (DFL-Roseville) will be chair of finance, and Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope) will be tax chair.

Sen. Mark Johnson (R-East Grand Forks) will be minority leader.

As *Access Press* reached the deadline for this issue, other committee leadership and any changes in committee structure hadn't been announced.

Work continues on legislative agendas. The Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD) hoped to wrap up its work soon.

The Minnesota Council on Disability hosts its 2023 legislative forum, noon to 2 p.m. Friday, December 16. The event will be virtual. Learn about the council's legislative agenda, hear elected officials and their thoughts on disability policy, and learn from citizen advocates. Sign up through the state council web page, at <https://www.disability.state.mn.us/>

Rally days are also being planned, with many groups hoping to return to in-person or hybrid events.

Walz announced his cabinet November 15. Although most leaders are returning, Malcolm's decision to retire will be deeply felt. She guided the state through the

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2022, December



FROM OUR COMMUNITY

# Our year-end NewsMatch campaign needs your help!

by Holly Anderson, Executive Director

When my daughter was a toddler, she went to a daycare where she learned among other things, about the Jewish holiday called Purim. This is a joyous holiday with a great tale, costumes and special cookies called hamantaschen.

There is also a very serious part of the holiday about giving. The gist of it is that everyone, no matter how poor has something to give someone less fortunate. When I first read this, I was taken aback.

My mother lives on Social Security Disability and has about \$30 after she pays rent and utilities. (In full disclosure, she lives in California, which is expensive, even for low-income housing.) I remember calling her and telling her about the holiday and the concept. She said that she could relate and when she could, she would give \$5 to \$10 to charity. "It's not much, but it has to help a little," she said.

I was surprised to hear it and asked how did she ever have an extra \$5? She said, "I care about the environment, and I figure I can go without some sweet thing or lotion to help save it." She then reminded me of a Christmas song she likes to sing, "Christmas is coming the geese are getting fat, won't you please put a penny in the old man's hat. If you haven't got a penny a ha'penny will do. If you haven't got a ha'penny, God Bless You!" I guess the value of giving is a part of many beliefs.

As a nonprofit fundraiser, I have noticed over the years that the percentage of income that people give is disproportionate to the amount they give. You'll have your investment banker friend who gets a company match give you \$30 for your charity bike ride and your friend who was just laid off gives you \$200. Why we give, what we give, and to whom we give is incredibly personal.

Frankly, to me it doesn't matter what you decide to give. What matters is that we all find a way to give.

We are excited to be brand new participants in NewsMatch. NewsMatch is a collaborative fundraising movement to support independent, public service journalism like ours. Since 2016, the campaign has helped raise over \$223 million to support independent media outlets that produce fact-based, nonpartisan news and information.

In December, NewsMatch will match your new monthly donation 12 times or double your one-time gift, all up to \$1,000. That means that through NewsMatch, we can raise an additional \$15,000!

For a small, independent, nonprofit organization like *Access Press*, this is a big deal and will help us deliver the kind of disability community-focused journalism you've come to expect. It's the kind of reporting that can make a real difference in our community.

Typically, as people think about making charitable gifts, news sources don't top the list. This is why public radio and TV have weeklong pledge drives. We at *Access Press* also have to remind our readers that we depend on your support. While we do offer advertising, it does not cover all of our costs. This year we are asking you to find that crumpled up \$5 or \$10 or \$1,000 you have lying around and give it to your favorite Minnesota disability newspaper. In full disclosure we are the only one in Minnesota. You will make double the impact.

What do you say? Will you help to sustain your trusted source of disability-related, pity-free news?

Community funded, community driven: that's the nonprofit news difference. Make a donation today



Holly Anderson

Sustain your trusted source of news.

DONATE TODAY

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MINNESOTA'S DISABILITY COMMUNITY NEWS SOURCE

News Match

## LEGACY

From page 1

and support services, group homes and the Epic Enterprise developmental achievement center in Dundas.

Northfield author and historian Susan Hvistendahl chronicled the organization's history for the *Northfield Entertainment Guide*. This article is excerpted from her work. Be aware that in histories, language is used that would not be used to describe people with disabilities today.

Who was Laura Belle Baker? Baker was born in Chariton, Iowa, on April 10, 1859. From a family of farmers and activists, her first teaching job was at Iowa's Glenwood Asylum for Feeble Minded Children, followed by 12 years as principal at the Faribault State School for the Feeble Minded.

Baker, supported by parents who wanted more for their children, opened her own boarding school in 1897 in South Minneapolis. It was the only private school of its kind in the region. One year later the quest for a quiet rural location took her to Northfield.

Baker lived with her students during the school's first 19 years, with housekeepers, house mothers and teachers. *Northfield News* articles in the early 20th century sang the school's praises. Students in grades K-8 took a full range of classes and enjoyed evening sessions that included dance, gymnastics and singing. They also did handwork.

"Doing Splendid Work" was the headline of a June 25, 1920, *Northfield News* story about another program and exhibit of work at the school. "Miss Baker is the soul of the institution but modestly gives credit" to her teachers," the article stated. Baker proudly announced she was invited to commencement exercises at the University of Minnesota for a young man who had been her pupil for three years.

But that same year, Laura Baker School had a tax fight on its hands. The question was whether the school was entitled to be classified as an institution of learning and thus exempt from property taxes – or were the children merely taken care of in a custodial fashion? On Oct. 1, 1920, the *Northfield News* gave Judge A.B. Childress' emphatic decision, ruling the school exempt from taxation. "The work done and benefits accomplished by the 'Baker School' are of inestimable value to the state. Not alone in the matter of lightening our burdens of taxation, but this school lifts many children from a condition of darkness into light and from a condition little above the animal to that of cheerful, happy, human beings. In my judgment no greater benefit could be conferred upon the state."

The school grew academically and



Northfield's first Laura Baker School

physically over the years, with activities including dramatics, glee club, square, tap and ballroom dancing and band. Baker's philosophy was that singing, dancing and percussion opened minds to further learning.

Progress continued within the late 1920s with the construction of Margaret Graves Hall, a two-story brick dormitory in Northfield for 18 and 20 pupils. Baker designed facilities to be homelike, something unheard of at that time. In 1928 Baker School purchased a former Faribault mansion for use as the Buckeye Hall school. That facility had about a dozen pupils.

By the end of 1937, the Laura Baker School had 50 students, 10 teachers, 8 house mothers and 12 other workers. By then the school had helped 350 pupils. By the time of the 75th anniversary in 1973, it was estimated that about 700 pupils had been aided by the school.

Baker herself became a legendary educator, described as strict yet with a soft spot for disabled children. Her methods were ahead of the times.

Northfield historian and longtime *Northfield News* journalist, Maggie Lee, wrote of Baker: "Miss Baker was a tall woman with regal carriage and, during many of her Northfield years, was crowned with snow-white hair. She was described as firm, desirous of perfection, yet patient

and able to lavish love on her charges." A student once gave her the nickname "Old Hawkeye," a nod to her Iowa roots but, as Lee said, "also because she kept very close watch over her beloved charges."

Baker never married, but was a beloved and important figure in countless lives.

A parent wrote to Baker in 1941, "Since happiness comes from making others happy you should be the happiest person in the world. You stand ahead of anyone I have ever known for example of doing for others."

Baker's niece and namesake Laura Baker Millis moved to Northfield in 1938 to continue the school's work. Her husband, Henry (Harry) Millis, handled business management. Baker's niece was a graduate of the National Kindergarten College of Evanston, Illinois, and quite prepared to continue her aunt's work.

By then Baker was living across the street from the school and active at an age when most people would be long retired. Her final years were marked by frail health. When she reached her 100th birthday on April 10, 1959, the milestone was celebrated at the hospital with family. She reached her 101st birthday and died on June 7, 1960.

Baker in one interview looked back with satisfaction on her life's work as she expressed her philosophy. "A pupil needs to wonder about a thing in order to learn about it. If one approach doesn't bring a response, another must be tried to open up an interest. It is necessary to begin where the child is and to go on from there with the very next step."

Recalling pupils and their progress, she said, "I am happy."

The original house was razed in 1989 and replaced by a new administration building in 1990. Longtime workers have said they have heard Baker's footsteps at the old and current building, with doors opening and closing and furniture moved. A video at the LBSA website even purports to show a ghostly figure on the staircase which was preserved from the original house and installed in the lobby of the administration building.

Learn more about Laura Baker and LBSA at <https://www.laurabaker.org/> Read Hvistendahl's article at <https://entertainmentguidemn.com/hh-apr12>

Read more about LBSA and Baker herself at [southernminn.com](http://southernminn.com)

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