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Beer tax hike urged

Health board wants lawmakers to act

By BRIAN REISINGER
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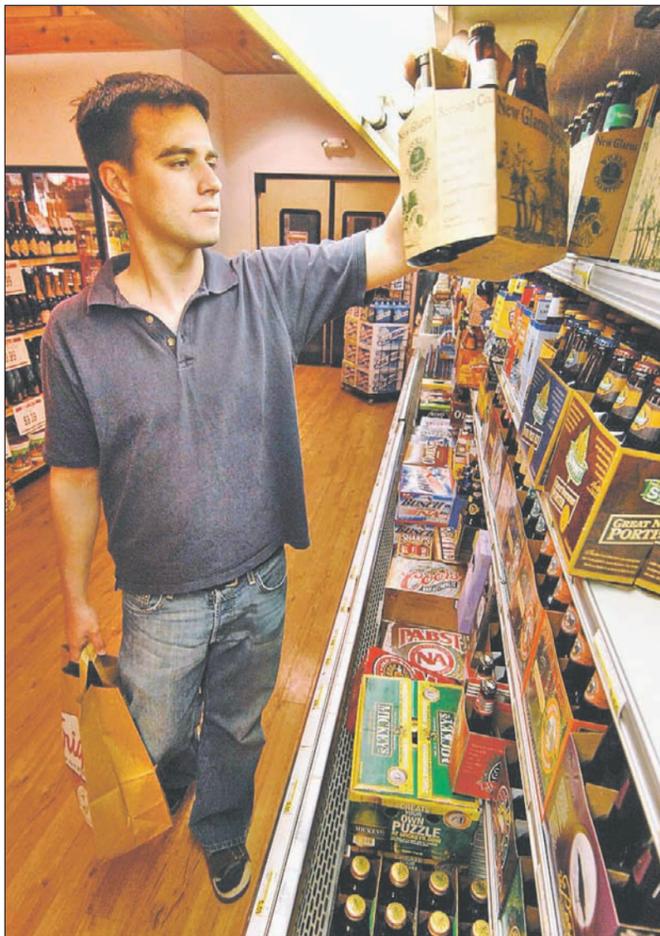
Marathon County leaders have developed a resolution that calls on the state Legislature to raise Wisconsin's beer tax — a move some local businesses say is unfair and badly timed.

The Marathon County Board of Health approved a draft of the resolution Tuesday that supports a tax increase on beer and other fermented malt beverages to pay for alcohol treatment, prevention and enforcement.

In the last legislative session, Rep. Terese Berceau, D-Madison, proposed a bill to increase the tax from \$2 to \$10 per barrel of beer. The bill was not acted upon by legislators, but she plans to reintroduce it during the next legislative session, her office confirmed Tuesday. Wisconsin's tax is tied for the second-lowest in the nation, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators.

The county resolution still needs approval by other county panels and eventually the full County Board.

If the tax were raised and the revenue shared with local units of government, county officials say the



Jeff Sauer, 26, of Wausau picks up a six-pack of beer Monday at Trig's Cellar 70.

BUTCH MCCARTNEY/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

How much would it cost?

Tax per barrel	Per six-pack	Per 12 oz. bottle	Annual revenue
Current: \$2	3.6 cents	0.6 cents	\$9.8 million
Proposed: \$10	18 cents	3 cents	\$48.8 million

Source: Rep. Terese Berceau's failed 2007 proposal to increase the state's tax on fermented malt beverages.

additional funding would be used to address concerns about public safety, health and the overloaded criminal justice system.

Julie Willems Van Dijk, health officer at the Marathon County Health Department, said she would aim to make alcohol screening a priority during medical checkups and make health education specialists available to local clinics.

Local beer purveyors say it's unfair to target alcohol as a danger

to public health with so many other risks out there.

"Where do you draw the line?" asked Kevin Eichelberger, co-owner of Red Eye Brewing Company, which is set to open soon east of downtown Wausau.

Eichelberger and Merlin Adams, assistant manager at Cellar 70, the beverage center at Trig's in Wausau, agreed that the tax increase, however moderate, would trickle down to consumers.

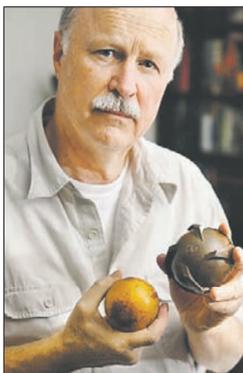
Mosinee bomb hunter subject of public TV show

By ROBERT MENTZER
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Back in the United States after months spent clearing away old explosives in the jungles of Laos, a retired local school principal will be featured this week on Wisconsin Public Television.

Jim Harris of Mosinee spent almost all of 2006 in the villages of Laos, and since then has been on a part-time schedule, spending two months there followed by three months in the United States. He will speak about his work on WPT's "In Wisconsin" Thursday.

Harris, a former Weston Elementary School principal who also writes about his experiences for the Wausau Daily Herald Web site, said there still



COREY SCHJOTH/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

Mosinee resident Jim Harris shows some of the unexploded ordnance he works to remove from Laos.

are 9 million to 12 million unexploded bombs in Laos, dropped by U.S. fighters during the Vietnam-era "Secret War." No village is untouched by the effects, he

On TV and online

Jim Harris will appear at 7 p.m. Thursday on Wisconsin Public Television's "In Wisconsin."

Harris' writing for the Daily Herald can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/5173dv>.

Harris also has a Web site with more information and photos from his travels at www.everestinfo.org/laos2.

said, as new explosions routinely kill or maim villagers.

"On my good days, I say to myself, well, we (destroyed) 1,000 bombs — certainly one of those would have claimed a life or a limb," Harris said. "On my bad days, I say to myself, one of those 9 mil-

lion bombs that are left tomorrow will probably kill a guy I saved today."

Still, Harris said he sees no alternative but to continue to methodically remove the bombs. And he has seen progress in Laos since he first visited in 2000, including advances in infrastructure and in residents' awareness of how to avoid unexploded ordnance.

Harris' wife, Marty, taught art and English at private colleges in Laos in 2006. She emphasized the value for Wisconsinites of learning about the country.

"I think it's important for people to know ... that our neighbors and friends who are Hmong-American have ties back in Laos, and have families back in Laos," she said.

Harris plans to return to Laos this summer.

3 men storm home, leave with lockbox

By JEFF STARCK
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Police still are looking for suspects in two unsolved robberies that occurred Monday in Wausau.

The latest robbery occurred just before midnight in the 100 block of Ross Avenue in Wausau, according to police. The multi-family home is located in a neighborhood about one block west of Grand Avenue.

Three men carrying handguns knocked on the door and pushed their way past the female occupant when she answered, Wausau police Lt. Ben Bliven said.

The men left the home with a lockbox, but police have not said what was inside.

The resident told police all three men wore black jeans, shoes, sunglasses and gloves, Bliven said. Two of the men were at least 6 feet tall and skinny and the other was short and skinny, police were told. They also wore black or gray sweat shirts.

Police still are searching for the man who robbed the Kwik Trip store at 2203 N. Sixth St. in Wausau at about 1:30 a.m. Monday. The robber did not display or threaten to have a weapon, police said.

Wausau has experienced nine robberies since Jan. 1, seven in which the suspects were armed, according to police records. Arrests have been made in three cases.

Robberies have not been limited to Wausau. Pharmacies and cash stores in Weston were hit last fall and winter. Last week, a Wausau man was arrested in connection with a pair of armed robberies in Brokaw and the town of Wausau.

Drugs or cash for drugs was the driving force behind many of the robberies, police have said.

Michael Scott, a former police chief and a clinical associate professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School, said people who seek drugs or money in a robbery often are more desperate than someone who commits an ordinary crime, and might be more brazen.

Catholics brace for shortage of priests by 2025

By RICK LAFROMBOIS
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Bishop Jerome Listecki is expected to accept a pastoral plan Thursday that addresses the potential for a priest shortage in the La Crosse Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church.

Vastly simplified, the plan, which some consider just a contingency, would call for the number of parishes in the diocese to be reduced by about half by 2025. This would be done by merging current parish administrations. Churches likely would remain open, though many pastors could handle the sacramental duties at more than one locale.

The plan affects more than 200,000 Catholics and 165 parishes within the 19-county La Crosse Diocese, according to a diocese statement. There are 15 pastors and one associate pastor serving 21 parishes in the Wausau Deanery, said the Rev. Charles Hiebl, deanery

coordinator and pastor for parishes in Athens, Milan and Poniatowski.

Listecki is expected to accept the plan during a formal public ceremony at 1 p.m. Thursday at the Holy Cross Diocesan Center, 3710 East Ave. S., in La Crosse.

Hiebl said he will not attend the ceremony because he has seen the plan and expects nothing to change in the Wausau Deanery in the foreseeable future.

"It basically is modeled for the year 2025," he said. "(The merged parishes) will take place gradually as we see the need for those things to take effect."

Diocesan leaders decided to craft the plan after a 2005 Georgetown University study of diocese trends and statistics predicted the number of total diocesan priests — now about 175 — could decrease by half by 2025, Benedict Nguyen, chancellor of the La Crosse Diocese, said earlier this year.

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