

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2020

# Chanhassen Villager

BREAKING NEWS ONLINE AT WWW.CHANVILLAGER.COM



PHOTO BY AUDREY KENNEDY

Tammy Mengrum and son Kayden participate in the New Beginnings program. Mengrum is one of the students hoping to move into the Beyond New Beginnings building at the end of the year.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

New nonprofit provides affordable housing for young families

BY AUDREY KENNEDY  
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The sky is gloomy on an early Monday morning, but inside East Creek Family Center it's cheerful and bright.

Young moms are scattered around a colorful childcare room, talking amongst themselves while watching their babies.

High school senior Madison Lee feeds her 8-month-old daughter Hazel in a high chair, while Shay Felix's 1-year-old son Ezra toddles around the room, grasping at toys before returning to his mother's lap.

As the clock ticks to 8:30 a.m., the high school students begin heading to class, knowing their young children will be safe and cared for. After a long weekend post-MEA, the New Beginnings program is back in session.

New Beginnings has been supporting pregnant and parenting students since its inception over 40 years ago. A full-time alternative program offered by Southwest Metro Intermediate School District 288, students from more than a dozen southwest metro schools, like Eastern Carver County, Jordan, Prior Lake and Shakopee, can obtain their high school diplomas and have access to childcare, counseling and other social services support.

The program has been a big success — it has an 85% graduation rate and has seen healthier babies thanks to its prenatal classes, said longtime New Beginnings teacher Jill Engeswick, who is now retired. But after high school ended, many were left without a support system or a place to stay.

"They graduated and sometimes it would be like, 'Now what?' Some girls don't have secure or safe housing, and we just thought, how can we get a place where these girls can live that would be safe? It would make such a difference," Engeswick said.

Enter "Beyond New Beginnings," a new nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting young families by providing safe, secure housing and programming for those currently enrolled or graduated from New Beginnings.

The brainchild of Engeswick, longtime New Beginnings teacher Sue Schmidt and active community service member Russell St John, Beyond New Beginnings is the natural next step to help young families get support while pursuing their education, personal and professional goals — like senior Tammy Mengrum, who will most likely live in the housing with her 2-year-old son Kayden.

"I'm really excited. I can finally have my own place," she said.

If all goes according to schedule, four young families will move into a Chaska apartment building by Christmas.

"Think about when you graduated from high school. Were you ready to face the whole world? When you have a child on your hip?" said Schmidt. "We need to continue that support so they continue to be successful, getting their feet on the ground and making those steps forward."

### BEGINNING OF BEYOND

While the idea for Beyond New Beginnings had been in Schmidt's mind for a while, it wasn't until she spoke at a Rotary Club meeting benefiting New Beginnings that the program started to get off the ground.

St John was in attendance when Schmidt mentioned returning to ask for support for housing young moms. Schmidt's ideas stuck with him, and by June 2019, St John, Schmidt and Engeswick were making tentative plans for a building for young families.

While St John may not have on-the-ground experience like his co-founders, he knew fundraising, strategic planning and hundreds of community members that might be able to help, he said.

Originally, the three wanted to build or refurbish their own building that

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# 'Waiting for Tom Hanks' at the library

The Chanhassen Library will be closed for library services on Tuesday, Nov. 3 as the library will be used as an election polling place.

"You've Got Mail" Do you recognize this signature AOL email greeting? Perhaps it takes you back to the 1998 Nora Ephron film starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Email has become a mainstay in our personal and professional lives. Carver County Library is teaming up with the Loft Literary Center on Saturday, Nov. 7 at 10 a.m. to help you stay on top of this:

**The Loft Literary Center Improving Emails and Enews:** 10 a.m., Saturday, Nov. 7. Email remains one of the cornerstones of marketing plans and workplace communication. Yet, our inboxes are flooded, our emails go unanswered, and we delete more than we read. Is this just the way it is, or is there anything we can do to make email — both internal and external — more effective? Of course, from the subject line to the signature file, we'll



Jodi  
EDSTROM

examine newsletters, email correspondence, and maybe even a spam message or two to look at what inspires action and what just falls flat. Registration required at [carverlib.org/calendar](http://carverlib.org/calendar). Presented by The Loft and funded by MELSA.

## ROMANTIC COMEDIES

Romantic comedies have also become a mainstay in films and books alike. I admittedly just binge-watched the new "Emily in Paris" series on Netflix. If you would rather delve into a book, here are some next generation rom-coms, including one that references Tom Hanks and

Nora Ephron:

**"The Bookish Life of Nina Hill"** by Abbi Waxman. Meet Nina Hill: A young woman supremely confident in her own... shell. Nina has her life just as she wants it: a job in a bookstore, a kick-butt trivia team, a world-class planner and a cat named Phil. If she sometimes suspects there might be more to life than reading, she just shrugs and picks up a new book. When the father Nina never knew existed suddenly dies, leaving behind innumerable sisters, brothers, nieces, and nephews, Nina is horrified. They all live close by! They're all — or mostly all — excited to meet her! She'll have to Speak. To. Strangers. It's a disaster!

**"The Friend Zone"** by Abby Jimenez. Kristen Peterson doesn't do drama, will fight to the death for her friends, and has no room in her life for guys who just don't get her. She's also keeping a big secret: facing a medically necessary procedure that will make it impossible for her to have children. Planning her best friend's

wedding is bittersweet for Kristen — especially when she meets the best man, Josh Copeland. He's funny, sexy, never offended by her mile-wide streak of sarcasm, and always one chicken enchilada ahead of her hungry. The only catch: Josh wants a big family someday.

**"The Kiss Quotient"** by Helen Hoang. Stella Lane thinks math is the only thing that unites the universe. She comes up with algorithms to predict customer purchases — a job that has given her more money than she knows what to do with, and way less experience in the dating department than the average 30-year-old. It doesn't help that Stella has Asperger's and French kissing reminds her of a shark getting its teeth cleaned by pilot fish. Her conclusion: she needs lots of practice — with a professional.

**"I Owe You One"** by Sophie Kinsella. Fixie Farr has always lived by her father's motto: "Family first." And since her dad passed away, leaving his

charming housewares store in the hands of his wife and children, Fixie spends all her time picking up the slack from her siblings instead of striking out on her own. It's simply not in Fixie's nature to say no to people. So when a handsome stranger in a coffee shop asks her to watch his laptop for a moment, she not only agrees — she ends up saving it from certain disaster.

**"Waiting for Tom Hanks"** by Kerry Winfrey. Romantic-comedy-obsessed Annie Cassidy dreams of being the next Nora Ephron. She spends her days writing internet content, re-watching "Sleepless in Seattle," and waiting for her movie-perfect meet cute. If she could just find her own Tom Hanks — a man who's sweet, sensitive and possibly owns a houseboat — her problems would disappear and her life would be perfect. But Tom Hanks is nowhere in sight.

## EVENTS

While all events in libraries are canceled, the

library is hosting virtual storytimes on Mondays at 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m., and Fridays at 10:30 a.m. Find these events and more on our Facebook page.

You can also find other great kids and adult programs such as:

**Sing Play Learn with MacPhail Live:** 10:30 a.m., Friday, Nov. 6. For ages birth-PreK. Join MacPhail Center for Music's early childhood music specialists as we explore the magic of music and play. Through hands-on musical play activities, families will experience music's impact on learning and reading readiness skills. Together we will sing, rhyme, read move and create! This project was funded (in part or in whole) with money from Minnesota's Art and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Jodi Edstrom is branch manager for the Chaska Library. For questions about services, contact staff at [www.carverlib.org/about-us/contact-us](http://www.carverlib.org/about-us/contact-us) or reach out to Edstrom directly at 952-227-7603 or [jedstrom@cc.carver.mn.us](mailto:jedstrom@cc.carver.mn.us).

# Red Cross holds local donation drives

## STAFF REPORT

The American Red Cross is urging healthy donors of all blood types to give blood to ensure a strong supply for patients as the U.S. braces for flu season while in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a news release from the organization.

Medical experts are urging people to get the flu shot to avoid a flu epidemic on top of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the organization said. Because blood can only

be given by those who are feeling well, a severe flu season could create additional challenges to maintaining a sufficient blood supply for hospital patients in need. There is no waiting period to give blood or platelets after receiving a flu shot as long as the donor is symptom-free and fever-free. "There is no risk of transmitting the influenza virus after receiving a flu vaccination.

For those that have the flu, it is important to wait until they no longer exhibit

flu symptoms, have recovered completely and feel well before attempting to donate. Donors must feel healthy and well on the day of donation.

Donors can make an appointment to donate blood by downloading the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org), calling 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or enabling the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device. The Red Cross is testing blood, platelet and plasma donations for CO-

VID-19 antibodies. The test may indicate if the donor's immune system has produced antibodies to this coronavirus, regardless of whether an individual developed COVID-19 symptoms. Red Cross antibody tests will be helpful to identify individuals who have COVID-19 antibodies and may now help current coronavirus patients in need of convalescent plasma transfusions, according to the Red Cross.

Donation drives will be held the following days:

## CARVER COUNTY

**Waconia**  
■ 1-7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4, American Legion Waconia, 233 Olive St. S.

**Watertown**  
■ 12-6 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 512 Madison St. SE

## SCOTT COUNTY

**Jordan**  
■ 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11, Ridges at Sand Creek, 21775 Ridges Drive.  
**Prior Lake**

■ 1-7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 12, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 5634 Luther Drive SE.

**Savage**  
■ 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 30, Prior Lake High School, 7575 150th St. W

**Shakopee**  
■ 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Minnesota Correctional Facility, 1010 W. 6th Ave.

Individuals who are 17 years of age in most states, weigh at least 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood.

## HOUSING

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would house 8-12 young families. Once St. John started sharing their ideas, support poured in from the community, local government, foundations, builders, architects — it just snowballed from there, Schmidt said.

Beyond New Beginnings is a nonprofit and unaffiliated with the school district and its programming, and the three originally expected their plans to build housing would take three to five years.

But by the summer 2020, they had secured a four-unit building in downtown Chaska thanks to a partnership with the Carver County Community Development Agency. While they haven't held any major fundraising events, St

John said Beyond New Beginnings has already received many inquiries and several substantial donations.

"All these different organizations that support the program, support the girls and their endeavors, want to see them be successful. That's what this is about — let's give them another leg up. Let's help them move forward. And be the best parent they can be," said Schmidt.

## PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

Housing candidates must be enrolled in or graduated from New Beginnings and have at least 50% custody of their child. They have to be in school full time, working full time or working toward their own personal goals. They also will pay 30% of their income toward rent.

CCDA will manage the

leases and maintain the property, but is otherwise unaffiliated with the program.

But it's not just about the apartments — the program also provides services similar to the New Beginnings courses. Parents will meet twice a month with their mentor and participate in empowerment classes, life skills and parenting curriculum to prepare them for true independence.

"This isn't a shelter, or a transitional home. They have to commit to being there for a year, no longer than two years, and commit to the program. They need to be making a better future for themselves, and we'll support them through it all," said Engeswick.

Part of the building will be a place to gather with their neighbors, friends and mentors. Thanks to Engeswick and students lobbying the

State Legislature last year, they now have free transportation to and from the New Beginnings facility — and can bring their kids on the bus.

When COVID-19 restrictions began, "everything that could go wrong, did go wrong," said Engeswick. Some students don't have reliable internet or a source of childcare while attempting to do online school, so they lost some of their students, Sue added.

But now, many of the 12 girls in the New Beginnings program are physically in school. Their toddlers are playing in the bright and colorful childcare rooms. Girls like Felix can plan on their future at Normandale Community College, knowing that they have reliable options for secure housing.

"What's more important



PHOTO BY ALOREY KENNEDY

New Beginnings student Madison Lee holds her 8-month-old daughter Hazel in the toddler room at East Creek Family Center. Lee, a senior, started at New Beginnings when she was pregnant.

than our young members of society who have been pushed to the side? As a community,

we love and care for them. We want to help get them to a better place," St. John said.