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# NORTH SHORE JOURNAL

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Christine Mallory, Editor

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## Driving Evaluations Now Offered at Lake View Hospital

By Kitty Mayo

Lake View Hospital in Two Harbors is now offering driving evaluations for the first time on the north shore.

Lake View, an affiliate of St. Luke's, recently sent four staff members to training at St. Luke's Driving Rehabilitation program with Ann Forrest Clark. Forrest Clark is an occupational therapist at St. Luke's Drive Safe program, and she is also a certified driving rehabilitation specialist and a state licensed driving instructor. With all of these qualifications, Forrest Clark is the only person in northern Minnesota who is certified to give driving evaluations to those with disabilities and impairments.

Mary Lou Donovan and Rachel Gischia are two occupational therapists at Lake View who received the training and are excited about the convenience for locals, and the added services for increasing driver safety.

"These tests are really about identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses, and really it's about keeping safety on the road for everybody," Donovan said.

With the help from fundraising by Co-op Light and Power, the hospital was able to purchase a stereo optic vision screening tool that evaluates many aspects related to driving.

The large table-top unit shows a variety of slides that the client looks at to test acuity like the eye doctor, depth perception, contrast and road signs. Peripheral vision, very important for driving, is also tested. The hospital has also added a reaction time tester, a piece of equipment that assess the speed that the customer can use their right leg and foot to move between a mock accelerator and brake.

Both Donovan and Gischia acknowledged that addressing driving issues can be emotional

for families, and a difficult topic to bring up. Some families express concern about an older family member driving, especially after they experience an illness, injury or some disability. Older drivers, or people with health issues such as seizures, brain injuries or strokes may need to have their driving abilities assess.

The in-clinic testing takes about an hour and a half to complete, and a medical history and driving history are also taken into account. Cognitive abilities like thinking, problem solving and reasoning, the ability to follow patterns, and visual perception abilities are tested and put into a driving risk calculator.

"The in-clinic portion that we can do in Two Harbors is usually covered by insurance and can save the time for a trip to Duluth," said Gischia. If a person chooses to do the behind-the-wheel testing in Duluth at

St. Luke's does have an out-of-pocket cost of several hundred dollars.

In cases where improvement can be expected, customers can be referred to work with the occupational therapists at Lake View to enhance their skills. Patients with a scanning skill impairment or head injury that can't turn their heads far enough to see well over their shoulder might work with a therapist on range of motion, or minor adaptations to a vehicle might be suggested.

If you are interested in finding out more about the driving evaluations for yourself or a family member, call Lake View rehabilitation department at: (218)834-7310, and ask to be scheduled with Mary Lou or Rachel. Most insurance coverage does require a referral by your physician for the evaluation.

## Northeastern Minnesota Getting Less Cold, and Wetter

By Kitty Mayo

Weather in northeastern Minnesota is changing in ways that might surprise, and creating a need for adaptation.

According to Kenny Blumenfeld, senior climatologist, Minnesota State Climate Office with the Department of Natural Resources, two primary things are changing in Minnesota's climate: it's becoming warmer, and wetter. However, he says that just how those changes are occurring can be difficult to communicate.

"How we are getting warmer is the most remarkable, it's an erosion of cold winter weather extremes. It does still get cold enough to kill you, but it just doesn't get as brutally cold the way it used to," said Blumenfeld.

The coldest temperature readings in the state used to hit negative 50 degrees, now Blumenfeld says that negative 40 or 30 degrees at the same rate of several times per year in the state. The effect is found in the decreasing number of days of deep snow cover. That "less cold" kind of warming comes from the fact that winter in the state over the last 45 years has been warming at ten times the rate of our summer temperatures, a climate change that Blumenfeld is directly correlated primarily to additional greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere.

"Even though we still get an old fashioned winter pretty regularly, it has some of the edges rubbed off of it," says Blumenfeld.

While winter warming is a less noticeable event than dramatic flooding events, Blumenfeld says that there are still serious negative consequences.

"If your coldest days are less cold it changes conditions for tree species and the whole forest is undergoing transition with some species not surviving, it also opens up conditions to pests that are more able to survive the winter," said Blumenfeld.

Based on science and data collected over the past decades, more frequent heavy rain and larger rain events are probably going to continue.

"We are shifting to a warmer and wetter climate, and we are seeing bigger versions of the biggest rain storms," Blumenfeld said.

Blumenfeld says that so far there does not appear to be a change in Minnesota's susceptibility to drought, and that so far there is no evidence that drought conditions are worsening in our region.

Un-severe weather. Surprisingly, Minnesota has been experiencing fewer than usual amounts of severe summer convective storms such as torna-

does, and wind storms.

"There's a real split in the science literature on about what it means and what is going to happen, but Minnesota is in a "severe weather drought" and has had a longer run without big tornadoes than has ever been observed," said Blumenfeld. It's a baffling trend that Blumenfeld says has been going on across the country since about 2010.

While annual precipitation in northeastern Minnesota is increasing, Blumenfeld cautions that interpretation of that should be taken on carefully. He says that a 25 percent increase of catastrophic rain events, like the one experienced in the area in 2012, still means such events are relatively rare and should be looked at as a more extreme version of the climate we've already had.

However, Blumenfeld did go on to say that preparedness for extreme weather is already poor throughout the state, and that making adaptations now is wise. That preparedness includes not only flood insurance, but also road, drainage and structure design.

Tom Beery, University of Minnesota Sea Grant program, Coastal Resilience Extension Educator, says that more "green" infrastructure is needed as we adapt.

Green stormwater infrastructure is one way the Sea Grant is

hoping to protect local communities from flood damage. Pollution, noise buffering and air filtering are some of the functions that green infrastructure can contribute, but more critically in terms of climate change projections, Beery says that it can be a powerful tool for stormwater management.

"Retention ponds, rain gardens, tree planting and perennial gardens slow the pulse of floodwater during intense storms and in doing so, prevent downstream damage and water quality degradation," Beery stated.

Retaining undeveloped upland forests and wetlands can also protect roads from erosion, undercutting and washouts, as well as preventing flooding in buildings.

Beery emphasizes that work to protect and invest in green infrastructure will not only help reduce economic costs from large rain events, but will also contribute to the quality of life of residents.

"This is not just future flood prevention, but current life enhancement--our roads can be better now, our developed areas greener and more pleasant for the people that live and work in those areas, our growing recreation economy can continue to grow and continue to make Duluth stand out as an outdoor recreation destination," Beery stated.

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