

Minneapolis

## Cat-astrophe! Walker ends Internet Cat Video Festival

By **Kathy Berdan**

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It seems the Walker Art Center's Internet Cat Video Festival will have just four lives.

The Walker announced Friday that it would no longer host the annual festival, which started in 2012 and has drawn tens of thousands of cat video fans, toured the United States and drawn international attention.

Another group or organization would be welcome to do something similar, said Rachel Joyce, assistant director of public relations at the Walker. But the Internet Cat Video Festival itself won't be passed along.

Select photos, documents and "assorted cat-themed ephemera" will find a forever home at the Minnesota Historical Society.

"The Walker's ingenious Internet Cat Video Festival is

a Minnesota original, a unique example of popular culture in our recent history," Lory Sutton, the historical society's chief marketing officer, said in a news release. "At the Minnesota Historical Society, we preserve and make available a wide range of materials chronicling our state's history and culture."

At the historical society, the cat video materials will join collection items such as Bob Dylan's 1960 party tape, Min-

nesota's 1849 Territorial Seal and a copy of "This Side of Paradise" dedicated to MNHS by its author F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Joyce said the first Internet Cat Video Festival in 2012 was "kind of a fluke." Walker staff was looking for ways to celebrate the end of the season for the museum's Open Field free Thursday night events in the green space next to the museum. An intern asked if she could show cat videos on

her laptop.

The cat video screening was included in a news release, and "it just took off. Overnight we started getting calls from media around the world," Joyce said.

The Walker figured they should prepare for as many as 2,500 people.

Ten thousand showed up. They wore cat costumes; they brought their feline friends.

Watching cat videos had become a community event,

rather than an individual activity, Joyce said.

The world went a little crazy for the idea. Coverage came from the New York Times, the BBC, CNN, the Wall Street Journal, Cat Fancy, National Public Radio, Japanese television, Time, Australian talk shows and Brazilian newspapers, according to the Walker's news release about the end of the festival.

CAT VIDEOS, 14A >

Downtown St. Paul

## Pooches on parade



PIONEER PRESS: JEAN PIERI

Mike Meyer, owner of dog-walking service Lofty Dogs, takes some of his four-footed friends for a spin Thursday All six — from left, Izzy, Lily, Percy, Nina (hidden behind Meyer), Adele and Layla — live with their humans in Rayette Lofts on Fifth Street in downtown St. Paul. Just how many dogs can he handle per outing? "I've done up to 16, but 10 or 12 is a lot more manageable," said Meyer, who draws his clientele from loft buildings and condos. He said he walks the dogs down by the Mississippi River and turns back at the High Bridge, covering about three miles.

St. Paul

## 'Bandit' suspect arrested (and not British)

Man charged, says he uses accent 'periodically'

By **Elizabeth Mohr**

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The "British Bandit," it turns out, is not British.

Police arrested a St. Paul man last week in a robbery said to have been committed by a man with a British accent.

But when police interviewed John Fredrik Hess after finding him at a St. Paul motel with dye-stained money and a journal detailing several robberies, it was clear he was local.

Hess, 45, was charged in federal court this week with one count of bank robbery for a Feb. 25 robbery at a TCF Bank on Ford Parkway in St. Paul.

At the time of the robbery, police said they were looking for a suspect believed to be connected to several robberies in the Twin Cities. The repeat robber, described in each case as a white male in his 40s, was dubbed the "British Bandit" for the accent he was said to have used in each incident.

According to charges filed this week, during the Feb. 25 incident, the bank robber produced a gun and said, "Give me your money and shut up and put the money in the bag." The teller slipped a dye pack into the bag with the money.

There's no mention of an accent in the criminal complaint.

Not long after the robbery, St. Paul police and the FBI got reports of a man passing dye-stained currency; they traced the money to Hess. He was arrested last week at a University Avenue motel in St. Paul.

Police found more dye-stained money in Hess' motel room, along with "a handwritten journal noting the dates

GUN BILL, 14A >

BRITISH BANDIT, 14A >

At the Capitol

## Two lawmakers introduce gun control bill

### Democrats seek universal background checks

By **Tad Vezner**

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Surrounded by toddlers, badges and gun control advocates, a pair of lawmakers introduced legislation Thursday calling for universal background checks for all gun buyers.

Senate judiciary chair Ron Latz, D-St. Louis Park, and Rep. Dan Schoen, D-Cottage Grove, initially stressed what the bill would not do: It would not create a gun registry. It would not take away existing guns. It would not restrict the number of guns you could own, they said.

Schoen compared the state's cur-

rent gun laws to allowing people to get into two lines at an airport — one with metal detectors, one without — and letting criminals pick which one they wanted to use.

"Which plane do you want to get on?" Schoen asked, adding that the large majority of point-of-sale background checks took 90 seconds.

The bill closes a loophole for gun buyers at gun shows and for sales online — which currently require no background check. It had some exceptions, such as exchanges between immediate family members and those relating to antiques.

If neither buyer nor seller is a federally licensed firearms dealer,

they're required to jointly appear before one; that dealer is then required to conduct "all background check and record-keeping requirements."

However, the bill specifies that the dealer is not required to make a report of the transfer in such a situation.

Minnesota Gun Owners Caucus put out a news release contending that the bill would not create a gun registry.

When asked to elaborate, caucus political director Rob Doer said those undergoing background checks have to fill out a federal form, which must be kept on file by registered dealers. While acknowledging that such data was not linked or networked in any way, "the large con-

cern with our members is there's a paper trail" that could be accessed by government officials down the line.

Several police chiefs, along with Ramsey County attorney John Choi, all spoke at a news conference in favor of the bill as essential for public safety.

Co-sponsor Schoen acknowledged during the conference that the bill likely faces an uphill battle in the Republican-controlled House — while also noting many rural Democrats are resistant to gun control laws — but he believes public opinion is overwhelmingly behind such a bill.

"Minnesotans actually believe this

## At age 92, St. Paul nun gets national honors for helping the poor

She waited until dessert to break the news to her Episcopalian parents and other relatives that she had decided to become a Catholic nun.

That went down about as well as when then-Gov. Rudy Perpich tapped her to become the first woman and nonphysician state health commissioner in Minnesota history. His decision was based partly on what might sound a bit sexist to an outsider: how quickly she picked which tie he should wear to an event.

Yes, Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, a St. Paul native credited with helping to found clinics for the low-income and uninsured in the Twin Cities, has had her share of achieve-



Rubén Rosario

ments and challenges in her 92-plus years. This month, the lifelong member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet will be honored, along with 14 other women, as part of the National Women's History Project's annual tribute. She is the second nun in the project's 35-year history to be so honored and among a handful of previous recipients from Minnesota that includes American Indian environ-

mental and writer Winona LaDuke, state Auditor Rebecca Otto and behavioral biologist Dr. Margaret Bryan Davis. Coretta Scott King, Dorothy Day and Sally Ride are among national figures similarly honored in recent years.

### STRONG TIES TO PERPICH

Ashton has a long list of public service accomplishments which I will get to below. But, chatting with Ashton in her home at an apartment complex for retired nuns, I most wanted to know about that dinner-table scene decades ago.

She essentially cleared the table with her surprise announcement. Parents, grandparents and a sister bolted from the table. The only family member who stayed put was the youngest sister, apparently too shocked or confused to join the exodus.

"I would tell anyone not to try that technique again," Ashton quipped this week. Raised off Portland Avenue near Snelling Avenue, the Midway girl and oldest of three daughters was given the choice by her mother to attend either Summit, a private school, or parochial Derham Hall, then an all-girls Catholic school.



COURTESY PHOTO

Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, who served as state health commissioner under Gov. Rudy Perpich, will be honored this month by the National Women's History Project.

"My father (Avon Ashton, a traveling car accessories salesman) did not want me to

go to Central because he thought it had problems," she said. "I wonder now how bad it could have been at that time."

She chose Derham because a friend across the street planned to go there. Though raised Episcopalian, she gravitated toward Catholicism after she realized it was the one church directly descended from Christ and his apostles.

Against her parents' wishes, she became a nun in 1946 at age 23 after she graduated from the College of St. Catherine (now St. Catherine Uni-

ROSARIO, 14A >

# Thank You, Governor Dayton



BRIAN O'KEEFE

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