



On Monday, Rudolph Grahek, left, was honored with medals for his time in the U.S. Army 67 years ago. During the event, at 7-Slot Grill in Reed City, U.S. Rep. John Moolenaar, State Sen. Curt VanderWall and State Rep. Michele Hoytenga awarded Grahek, now 87, with several medals. Grahek received the National Defense Service Medal, Korean Service Medal with one Bronze Service Star, the Combat Infantryman Badge and the United Nations Service Medal. (Pioneer photos/Alicia Jaimes)

Korean War veteran receives honors

Rudolph Grahek: 'I couldn't believe it — I was just in awe.'

BY ALICIA JAIMES
Pioneer Staff Writer

REED CITY — Drafted into the U.S. Army after graduating high school in 1952, Rudolph Grahek never thought he'd be receiving medals for his active duty 67 years later.

"I just couldn't believe it," Grahek said. "When they said they were going to set this up, I thought one or two guys would be here and maybe just give me my medals, but my goodness, I come into the room and it's half full — I couldn't believe it — I was just in awe."

Born and raised in Cadillac, Grahek was drafted and sent to Camp Atterbury in Illinois after graduation. Then, he was sent to Busan, Korea, as a .30-caliber machine gunner.

Grahek was in the Battle of Pork Chop Hill, which, according to a news release, was one of the worst battles the Army faced.

Before being discharged in 1954, Grahek also learned to fly.

U.S. Rep. John Moolenaar, State Sen. Curt VanderWall and State Rep. Michele Hoytenga awarded Grahek, now 87, with several medals Monday at 7-Slot Grill, in Reed City.

"It's truly an honor to recognize the service of a hero like Rudy," Moolenaar said.

SEE HONORS, 2A

Felony firearms case against Ferris student bound over

Pretrial conference set for Dec. 9

BY TAYLOR FUSSMAN
Pioneer Senior Staff Writer

BIG RAPIDS — A Ferris State University student accused of possessing a stolen handgun will face charges in Mecosta County's 49th Circuit Court.

The case against Frederick Leon Red Jr., 18, of Detroit, was

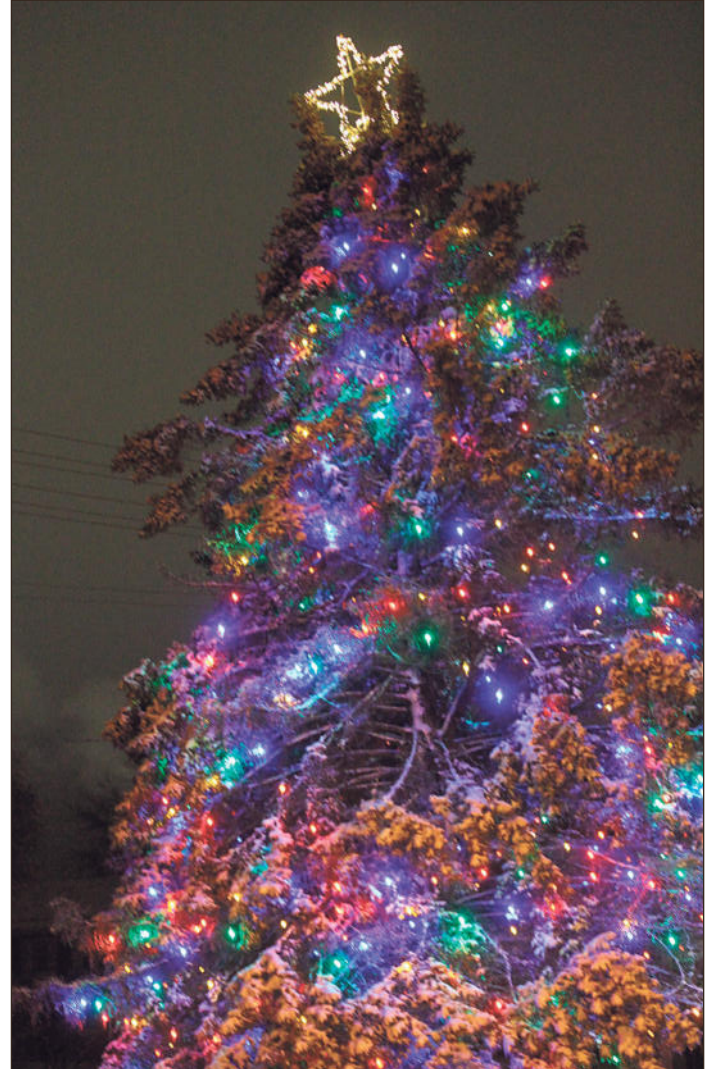
bound over to circuit court Nov. 19, following a probable cause conference in Mecosta County's 77th District Court.

According to court records, Red was charged with counts of receiving and concealing weapons/firearms and possession of weapons/felony firearms.

The charges stem from a tip received by

SEE STUDENT, 2A

Spectrum Health hosts final tree-lighting ceremony



Crowd gathers for holiday festivities

Area residents gathered at Spectrum Health Big Rapids Hospital Monday night to ring in the holidays with a tree-lighting ceremony. The tree was lit by Dr. Thomas Wright, who will be retiring from Spectrum Health in February. Also at the event, visitors had the chance to listen to Christmas carols sung by the Big Rapids Middle School choir, enjoy cookies and hot chocolate, visit with Santa, take horse-drawn sleigh rides and more. While the event has been a tradition for the past 22 years, this will be the hospital's final tree-lighting ceremony due to the tree's old age and poor health. (Pioneer photos/Catherine Sweeney)

School officials search for bus drivers

Shortage impacts local schools

BY CATHERINE SWEENEY
Pioneer Staff Writer

MECOSTA COUNTY — As school districts across the country struggle to find school bus drivers, local school officials say the national shortage has been a major issue for them as well.

A survey conducted by the National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT) showed 52% of participating school districts identified a bus driver shortage as their biggest issue as a district. Additionally, 43% of survey participants said the issue was getting worse, while only 2% said they believed it was getting better.

"We always are looking for drivers. It's definitely a concern nationwide," Big Rapids Public Schools Superintendent Tim Haist said. "We need people who are willing to work and provide a safe route for our students."

Haist added though he is glad all BRPS driver positions currently are filled, BRPS is constantly looking for substitute drivers. The district recently filled a position that had been vacant since October.

Bob Grover, superintendent at Chippewa Hills School District, said as a rural district with a 33-bus fleet, filling bus driver positions is something CHSD struggles with as well.

"We are trying to fill positions all year long, day in and day out,"



A nationwide issue, a shortage of school bus drivers has had an impact on local school districts as well. (Pioneer file photo)

Grover said. "It's a difficult position to get in a giant vehicle, turn your back to everyone and drive in sometimes-dangerous conditions ... A lot of people think busing is an obligation rather than a privilege. We don't have to provide busing and the job is incredibly hard."

He added issues with filling these positions are largely due to the challenging aspects of the position, which include a lengthy hiring process, long hours and no benefits.

While drivers typically spend only six or seven hours actually driving their routes, the middle portion of their day is taken up while students are in school, giving drivers a 14-hour day, Grover said.

"The biggest deterrent is becoming a certified driver," he said. "It's a lot of hoops to jump through for a part-time gig."

According to the NAPT, to become certified, applicants must complete a series of coursework, submit an application with a fee and take an exam.

While larger area districts have been dealing with the driver shortage for many years, Crossroads Charter Academy Superintendent Chris White said the shortage is a new problem for CCA.

"We're a small district and we don't currently have regular routes,

SEE DRIVERS, 2A



TODAY'S WEATHER

Cloudy. A few flurries or snow showers possible. High near 35F. Winds SW at 5 to 10 mph.

MONDAY'S LOTTERIES

Midday Daily 3: 4-6-2 Fantasy 5: 1-4-7-8-24
Midday Daily 4: 2-6-9-0 Keno: 4-9-14-19-21-24-25-28-29-35-37-41-42-43-
Daily 3: 6-4-8
Daily 4: 5-1-6-9 44-45-57-64-65-73-74-79

OBITUARIES PAGE 3A

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