

Great Falls Rising Monthly Newsletter

January 2024



January was named after the Roman god Janus, who fittingly represented new beginnings. Start the first month of the year right. Learn about some fun traditions, quirky holidays, night sky sights and more. Don't just sit back, make sure you vote this year. It is more important than ever! Check your voter status here: [Voter Portal \(mt.gov\)](https://mt.gov/voter-portal).

There are several awareness months celebrated in January — though the five that often get the most attention include National Blood Donor Month, Cervical Health Awareness Month, Mental Wellness Month, Poverty Awareness Month, and Veganuary.

Join us for our gathering this month on Hate and Extremism in Montana on **January 16th**. More information for the event is listed here in the newsletter.

What's coming up?

Tuesday, January 2nd – City Commission Work Session **5:30 pm**, agenda [here](#); City Commission Meeting **7:00 pm**, agenda [here](#).

Monday, January 8th – Great Falls Public Schools Board of Trustees Meeting, **5:30 pm**. Agenda will be posted here when the date nears: [Agendas & Minutes / Agendas & Meetings \(gfps.k12.mt.us\)](https://gfps.k12.mt.us/Agendas%20&%20Minutes/Agendas%20&%20Meetings).

Tuesday, January 9th – Cascade County Commission Meeting, **9:30 am**. Agenda can be found here as the date nears: [Agenda Center • Cascade County, MT • CivicEngage \(cascadecountymt.gov\)](https://cascadecountymt.gov/Agenda-Center-Cascade-County-MT-CivicEngage).

Tuesday, January 16th – City Commission Work Session **5:30 pm**; City Commission Meeting **7:00 pm**,. Agendas will be posted at these links as the date nears: [City Meetings: Council, Boards, Commissions, and Neighborhoods | City of Great Falls Montana \(greatfallsmt.net\)](https://greatfallsmt.net/City-Meetings-Council-Boards-Commissions-and-Neighborhoods).

Monday, January 22nd – Great Falls Public Schools Board of Trustees Meeting, **5:30 pm**. Agenda will be posted here when the date nears: [Agendas & Minutes / Agendas & Meetings \(gfps.k12.mt.us\)](https://gfps.k12.mt.us/Agendas%20&%20Minutes/Agendas%20&%20Meetings).

Tuesday, January 23rd – Cascade County Commission Meeting, **9:30 am**. Agenda can be found here as the date nears: [Agenda Center • Cascade County, MT • CivicEngage \(cascadecountymt.gov\)](https://cascadecountymt.gov/Agenda-Center-Cascade-County-MT-CivicEngage).

NEW CITY COMMISSION: **January 2nd** will see a new City Commission seated. Mayor Cory Reeves takes the lead with new Commissioner Shannon Wilson, and Commissioners Joe McKenney, Susan Wolff and Rick Tryon. Commissioner Tryon was re-elected in November and starts a new four-year term.

BOOKWORMS UNITED BOOK CHALLENGE: The Great Falls Public Library has started a new reading challenge for 2024 starting **January 2nd**. It's open to all residents of Cascade County who own a library card. The library has culled a list of categories for people to read from, and each person who reads one book per category and one category per book for a total of 50 books by **December 27, 2024** will eligible for a prize to be announced at a later date.

People can pick up a reading log at the library or download the PDF [here](#) to track

their progress. Some of the categories include "200 pages or fewer," "Published in 2024," "Written by a Josephine Miles Award Winner," "Science Fiction" "Book You Abandoned in the Past," and "Book About a Real Person," among others.

We also have compiled an online list of recommended books with a short description for each book for several of the categories: [Anthologies](#), [Art or Craft](#), [Business/Marketing/Entrepreneurship](#), [Most Challenged Books](#), [Civil Rights](#), [Classics You've Been Avoiding](#), [Environmental](#), [Genre Bending](#), [Magic](#), [Native Author](#), [Authors with a Pen Name](#), [Books about Revenge](#), [Science Fiction](#), [Spooky Books](#), and [Transportation Books](#).

To earn the prize for completing the challenge, one must submit their completed log to the library by **December 28** for staff to verify. Books read for other reading programs, book clubs, or assignments can be counted toward the challenge, provided they fit into the categories. Books in print, audio and electronic formats all will be accepted for the challenge. For more questions about the Bookworms United program, contact Sarah Cawley at (406) 453-0349 ex. 209 or email her at scawley@greatfallslibrary.org. For more information, click here: [Bookworms United Book Challenge 2024 | Great Falls, MT Public Library \(greatfallslibrary.org\)](#). This link will be live on **January 2nd**, when the program starts.

BOB KELLY RECEPTION: There will be a reception honoring outgoing Mayor Bob Kelly at The Newberry, 420 Central Ave., on **January 3rd** from **5:30 to 7:30 pm**. Join us in celebrating with Great Falls' longest serving mayor.

A MONTANAN ON A MISSION: Eamon Ormseth will give a presentation at Central Christian Church (1025 Central Ave.) on **January 3rd, 6:30 pm**, and at the Great Falls Public Library on **January 4th, 6:30 pm** in the Cordingley Room. Ormseth will talk about his year living in Beit Jala teaching English in a Palestinian Lutheran school from 2017 to 2018. Beit Jala is a town of about 13,500 people in the West Bank, just south of Jerusalem.

During his presentation, he will share his thoughts about the prospects for peace in Palestine/Israel, answer relevant questions about the current situation, and provide resources to learn more about the area. Ormseth said the talk is

grounded in his personal experience in the area. Before his mission, Ormseth studied History and Central and Southwest Asian Studies at the University of Montana. He's also served as an associate with Opportunity Palestine, whose mission is to sustain the educational institutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) through development and awareness building.

GFPS JAZZ WORKSHOP CONCERT: Come and ring in the New Year with our annual GFPS Jazz Workshop Concert on **January 5th at 7:00 pm** at the CM Russell Auditorium. Featuring the CMR Russtones (Christopher Kloker, director) and GFHS BlueNotes (Lisa Sundquist, director) Jazz Bands, along with special guests the Great Falls Community Jazz Band, directed by John Gemberling. It will be a fun evening of jazz and swing music to set your toes a -tappin! **FREE ADMISSION.** For more information, please call the GFPS Music and Art Department at (406) 268-6079.

CPR, AED & BASIC FIRST AID CERTIFICATION CLASS: Wednesday, **January 10th, 1:30 to 5:00 pm**, 1601 Central Ave. Register now to learn CPR/AED and Basic First Aid from a certified trainer using all materials and techniques as outlined by the American Safety & Health Institute. This class is open to the public (no age restrictions), but space is limited so pre-registration is required. Certification is valid for two years pending successful test completion. The cost is \$45 per person (payable by check made out to Quality Life Concepts or exact cash). Call Jeremy or Christine at (406) 452-9531 to check availability and reserve your spot.

SQUARED UP: The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is hosting an exhibition reception for 'Squared Up' which is an annual free art programs exhibition. The reception is on **January 12th from 5:30 to 7:30 pm**. An additional daytime reception highlighting Easterseals-Goodwill artists will be held earlier that day, from **11:00 am to noon**. Both events are free and open to the public.

The Square presents the works of 49 artists representing four of their education department's free community programs including Easterseals-Goodwill program, senior art class, curative art collection and Veterans Art Project.

THE BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL: Great Falls High School Auditorium, **January 12th at 6:30 pm**. Tickets available at www.gfskipatrol.org or at Bighorn Outdoor Specialists. Facebook event here: [The Banff Mountain Film Festival | Facebook](#).

THE SNOW BALL: The Great Falls Ski & Board Club Annual Winter Ball, open to the public (\$10 for non-members). The Melissa Lynn Band will be playing. **January 13th from 8:00 to 11:00 pm** at the Elks Ballroom, 500 1st Ave. South. Facebook event here: [Snowball | Facebook](#).

HATE AND EXTREMISM IN MONTANA: What we as a community need to know to stand against HATE. Tuesday, **January 16th**, Church of the Incarnation, 600 3rd Ave. North.

5:30 to 6:00 pm: View info tables on groups fighting Hate and Extremism
6:00 pm: Panel of Experts: Ken Toole (Mt Human Rights Network founder), Travis McAdams, (southern Poverty Law Center), Maggie Bornstein (ACLU)

Panelists will present history of Hate and Extremism in Montana and Current Hate and Extremism activities in the state and nation as well as Montana State Legislature connections and bills that promoted Hate and Extremism. Audience will be welcome to ask questions.

The hard-right movement mobilized Hate and Extremism from the mainstream to the main street in recent years. On January 6, 2021 the nation watched as our Capitol was attacked by Extremist groups. Since that time, we have seen the antisemites, conspiracy theorists and white nationalists welcomed by government officials. Great Falls and the state of Montana have seen the spread of hate literature in our communities. We are seeing Hate and Extremist groups everywhere: people's homes, schools, doctors' offices, libraries, bars,

restaurants, churches and other community spaces. The fear of the great replacement is spreading throughout our city. Great Falls Rising feels strongly that our community needs to be informed about what is happening and who these groups are. Unfortunately, some of our elected officials have connections to these groups. Join us for a critical discussion on Hate and Extremism in Montana.

STORYTELLERS OF MONTANA: The Power to Connect Our World with documentarian Lailani Upham. **January 18th, 7:00 pm**, Great Falls Public Library. Using her experience working on the documentary film projects *The Sixty-Four Flood* and *The Blackfeet Flood*, Lailani Upham leads participants through a discussion on the creative and healing process of storytelling. Upham is an Amskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet Nation) tribal member, along with Aaniiih, Nakoda, Dakota tribal descent and an adventure explorer, photographer, videographer, writer, and storyteller who travels throughout Montana to tell stories from an Indigenous perspective. She also is on the board of directors for the Freeflow Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Missoula, Montana, that delivers opportunities for creativity, space, and access to wild places for writers, artists, and leaders of all backgrounds. She also is an advisory board member for The Common Ground Project, based in Yellowstone.

In her two films, survivors on the Blackfeet Reservation told firsthand, historical accounts nearly 50 years after a tragic flood took lives and homes in the worst natural disaster in Montana history. Upham discusses how the documentary story connected our world. This program will offer engaging discussion on untold stories and understandings.

GFPS SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH: Great Falls Public Schools has opened a community survey for feedback as the district begins its search for a new superintendent. The survey closes on **January 19th at 5:00 pm**. Go to the survey here: [2024 Superintendent Search Survey for Great Falls Public Schools \(surveymonkey.com\)](https://surveymonkey.com).

Gordon Johnson, school board chair, said the responses will help the board know what qualities the community is looking for in the new superintendent. The minimum requirements for the superintendent are a masters degree or better in

school administration, a valid Montana administrator's certification with appropriate administrative endorsements upon hire and at least five years of experience in school administration. State law requires that school systems with 31 or more full time licensed staff employ a full-time licensed superintendent "who shall devote full time to administration and supervision."

SILVER CREST SKI TRAILS ARE MAINTAINED IN COOPERATION WITH THE USFS AND BOLT CREEK FARMER DISTRICT.



LEARN TO CROSS COUNTRY SKI FOR FREE!



JAN. 20th, 2024
9:30-4:30pm

SILVER CREST TRAILS
CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLINIC

OFFERING FREE! CLASSIC AND SKATE SKI INSTRUCTION
FOR BEGINNERS AND EXPERIENCED SKIERS!
CERTIFIED USSA INSTRUCTORS AVAILABLE!

3 SESSIONS AVAILABLE: Choice of 9:30AM, 11:45AM or 2:00PM
CONTACT: BOB BOLAND (406) 788-6565 / BBOLAND79@YAHOO.COM

Bring your own skis and boots if you have them!
TO RESERVE SKIS AND BOOTS, DROP BY OR CALL
Bighorn Outdoor Specialists / 206 5th Street South / Phone (406) 453-2841
Please do so ASAP as equipment is limited.

BRINGING THE U TO YOU: The "Bringing the U to You" Lecture Series is a collaborative effort of the UM Alumni Association and the MSU Alumni Foundation.

The 2024 lecture line-up:

LARRY D. MANSCH, UM
Attorney, Montana Innocence Project
7:00 pm | January 24th
The Innocence Project in Montana

DR. ROB THOMAS, UM WESTERN
Professor of Geology
7:00 pm | February 7th
Geothermal Energy and Geologic History of Montana

DR. ANGELA DES JARDINS, MSU
Associate Research Professor, Department of Physics
7:00 pm | February 21st
Great American Eclipse 2024

DR. JAYNE DOWNEY, MSU
Director, Center for Research on Rural Education
7:00 pm | March 13th
Rural Education: The Power of Place

The 2024 lectures will be held in person at Great Falls College-MSU.

Cost:

Entire series: \$25

Individual Lecture General: \$10

Individual Lecture Students: \$5

Limited seating available

To purchase tickets call (406) 899-0277.

Tickets also available at Kaufmans and Leslie's Hallmark in the Holiday Village Mall. Visit www.grizalum.org/events/utoyou/default.php for more info on speakers. Facebook event here: [2024 U to You Lecture Series | Facebook](#).

VOLUNTEER GREAT FALLS: Volunteer Great Falls is a great resource to find volunteer opportunities from local organizations. No ads, no opportunities that aren't local, and fully searchable. Check out [United Way of Cascade County \(galaxydigital.com\)](http://galaxydigital.com) today.

LEARN OVER 70 LANGUAGES WITH MANGO: The Great Falls Public Library now offers Mango Languages, the highest-rated language-learning program online, to anyone with a library card in good standing. Patrons can access Mango through the library's website, and start one of the many different learning programs. Languages on the platform include Spanish, French, Dutch, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Gaelic, Korean, Italian and more!

You can also sign up for free today at learn.mangolanguages.com. Mango also has a mobile app with downloadable lessons for offline access, study reminders, and placement tests. You can access the app on the Google Play Store for Android devices or the Apple App Store for Apple Devices. Check out Mango Languages here: [Mango Languages | Great Falls, MT Public Library \(greatfallslibrary.org\)](http://greatfallslibrary.org).

HOUSED GREAT FALLS COLD WEATHER DROP-IN CENTER: Thankfully for the unhoused citizens of our city, the fall and winter have been mild. When the bad weather does hit, please consider volunteering at the Cold Weather Drop-in Center downtown, at the First United Methodist Church, 610 2nd Ave. North. Their hope is to be open on evenings from **5:30 to 9:30 pm** when temperatures are below 25 degrees or a combination of temperature, wind, and/or precipitation make conditions life threatening. For more information, or to sign up to volunteer, click here: <https://signup.com/go/uwaQEkf> (the link may not be live until the cold weather hits, so keep checking).

EXTREMIST BEHAVIOR SPREADS IN GREAT FALLS: Great Falls Rising and Big Sky 55+ Board of Directors Member Pam Carroll wrote an important op-ed about the election difficulties in Great Falls. It was published in the [Helena](#)

Independent Record, Butte's Montana Standard, the Billings Gazette, The Missoulian, and The Daily Montanan. Read her Op-Ed article:

On Tuesday, December 12, 2023, the Grinch revealed itself in Great Falls, Montana. I saw the mean-spirited character manifested in citizens of Cascade County.

Cascade County Commission held their bimonthly meeting at the Expo Park in anticipation of large public attendance. Commissioner Joe Briggs brought forth a resolution to remove election duties from the Clerk and Recorder. This resolution has been talked about for several years.

Public comments were heard from over one hundred people, with many more in attendance to witness the spectacle of vile and spiteful testimony. This went on for seven long and excruciating hours.

As I sat in the audience listening to the public comments, I was so ashamed of the behavior of those speaking in opposition to the resolution. These are my neighbors who used threats, yelled, and told outright lies. The Bible quotes were thrown out over and over to attack commissioners Joe Briggs and Jim Larson. Two pastors in our community spewed hateful words. Not once did I hear these so-called church attending people speak to the call to love thy neighbor as thyself. It was like watching school yard bullies and toddler temper tantrums. Never in the 62 years that I have lived in Great Falls have I ever experienced anything like the hateful actions and words that I saw that day. I fought back tears of sadness that day for my community.

The restraint shown by Commissioners Joe Briggs, Jim Larson and those that spoke in support of the resolution is to be commended. Supporters spoke with decorum and integrity while expressing their concerns for the election process that has been flawed since Clerk and Recorder Sandra Merchant has taken office. They stuck to the facts and kept religion and emotion out of their testimony.

We are in need of change in Great Falls and around Montana as this type of extremist behavior spreads and basic community norms around public discussion and debate dissolve. Perhaps, the most disturbing aspect is the appeal to theocratic ideals which could not be more un-American. This country was founded on a fundamental separation between church and state, and we have upheld that value, embodied in the First Amendment to the Constitution, for

almost 250 years. The opponents' dogmatic appeal to a narrow-minded, intolerant brand of Christianity would be ridiculous if it were not so fundamentally dangerous and unconstitutional.

There is hard work ahead for all reasonable people of goodwill in this community and across Montana to try to bring us back to a semblance of decency and behavioral norms of civility and respect necessary for the community to not only survive but thrive. "Love thy Neighbor no Exception."

Coming up in February:

GFPS JOB FAIR: The Great Falls Public Schools will be having a JOB FAIR on **February 1st**, from **3:00 to 5:00 pm** at the Paris Gibson Education Center, 2400 Central Ave. On the spot interviews will be held for substitute teachers, teachers aides, food service staff, para professionals, crossing guards, custodians and more.

Thank you for your continual support to our 10,000 plus students in Great Falls Public Schools.

- * 21 schools (15 Elementary, 2 Middle schools. 3 High schools, 1 Early Learning Center)
- * Second largest school district in MT
- * Third largest employer in the community