

St. Cloud Times

GOING PINK FOR A PURPOSE

IN SPORTS PAGE 1C

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Blackberry Ridge names new CEO as Linda Fenlason retires



Linda Fenlason, left, co-owner and CEO of Blackberry Ridge Golf Club in Sartell, is retiring and selling her stake in the company to co-owner, CFO and sister-in-law Kittie Fenlason, who plans to share ownership with her son, Wes, shown Tuesday on the course. JASON WACHTER, JWACHTER@STCLOUDTIMES.COM

Linda selling her stake in company to sister-in-law Kittie Fenlason, whose son, Wes, will take over as CEO

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SARTELL — Linda Fenlason doesn't golf. That fact has always been an interesting side note for the 74-year-old to share as the co-owner and CEO of Blackberry Ridge Golf Club in Sartell. But when Linda announced this week that she was retiring and selling her ownership in the company, she expected golf to come up in questions about her plans for retirement years. "I'm going to Italy in the first month. Beyond that I don't know," Fenlason said, smiling at the thought that her calendar no longer needs to be full. Linda is selling her stake in the company to co-owner, CFO and sister-in-law Kittie Fenlason, who plans to share ownership with her son, Wes. The details of the transaction were not made public. Wes, who has a degree in turf management and has worked as the club's superintendent since 2006, has been named the new CEO of the

See CEO, Page 6A

St. Cloud couple fled California fires Monday They escaped, 'one gust away from being engulfed'

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Daniel and Judy Whitlock received a barrage of alarming texts when they turned on their phones Monday morning. The messages read: "You've got to get out of here. All the fires are all around us."

The Whitlocks, a St. Cloud couple, had rented a place in Sonoma, California, for a month to visit with Judy Whitlock's three sisters and tour around wine country. Now they're holed up in Tiburon, near San Francisco, with their daughter's family. The doors and windows are closed to keep out the smoke.

Daniel Whitlock talked by phone Wednesday about the dramatic and deadly wildfires that have hit California this week.

"We were really one gust away from being engulfed," he said of the Sonoma rental. "We could see smoke coming from many directions right around us."

The rash of fires started Sunday and spread with help from dry conditions and gusty winds. More than 20 people have died. More than 250 square miles have burned along with thousands of buildings.

Judy Whitlock's sister and brother-in-law were awakened for a mandatory evacuation from their home near Santa Rosa at 2 a.m. Monday. Her brother-in-law left his medication at home but the police wouldn't let him go back for it, Judy Whitlock wrote in an email.

"Also, people are pleading to go back and save their animals — but there is absolutely no allowing of that," she wrote. "It's so heartbreaking to watch this unfold and watch the conditions deteriorate."

See FIRES, Page 4A



Judy and Daniel Whitlock were visiting family in Sonoma, California, this month and had to evacuate due to fires. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Enbridge Energy defends plan to replace Line 3 oil pipeline

STEVE KARNOWSKI ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS - Enbridge Energy disputed a state agency's recommendation against the company's proposal for replacing its aging Line 3 oil pipeline across northern Minnesota, insisting in filings Wednesday that the project is needed to ensure adequate crude supplies for Minnesota and other Midwestern refineries for decades to come.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission is considering whether to grant a certificate of need for the project, which has aroused opposition from environmental and tribal groups because of the potential impacts on climate change and pristine waters where Native Americans harvest wild rice. The state Commerce Department surprised both sides last month when it concluded that the project isn't needed and that it won't benefit Minnesota enough to justify the risks.

Enbridge officials asserted in rebuttal filings with the PUC that the \$7.5 billion project is necessary and that Minnesota will benefit because it will make its pipeline network safer across the state and more reliable, and because the state is part of a broader regional market in which products from refineries in nearby states flow back to Minnesota.

"This is an essential project for

See LINE 3, Page 5A

6A Thursday, October 12, 2017 St. Cloud Times

CEO

Continued from Page 1A

golf course and events center. He said Linda will serve as a consultant for Blackberry Ridge.

"Filling Linda's shoes is, I would say, impossible," Wes said. "But we're going to figure out how to do that. Wherever I can slide in and fill shoes or put the right person in those shoes to fill that role, that's what we're going to do."

Wes says that while he appreciates the responsibility that comes with being CEO, he isn't intimidated by a scary title.

"I think the title I like best now is chief manager," Wes said. "Anybody who has managed anything well knows what they are good at and what they aren't good at. What I'm really good at is being a golf course superintendent."

He will be the third generation to run a business on the land on the north end of Sartell.

Wes' grandfather, Don



Linda Fenlason, co-owner and CEO of Blackberry Ridge Golf Club in Sartell, talks about retiring and selling her stake in the company to co-owner, CFO and sister-in-law Kittie Fenlason, who plans to share ownership with her son Wes, right, shown Tuesday at the course. JASON WACHTER, JWACHTER@STCLOUDTIMES.COM

Fenlason Sr., owned and operated the very first all-electric farm in Stearns County, situated on a 560-acre parcel of land in what used to be considered the middle of nowhere.

His sons, Donnie and Veryl Fenlason, grew up on that dairy farm and continued operating it late into life with the help of their wives, Linda and Kittie.

But as Donnie and Veryl began planning their retirement years, they decided to sell some of their family's land to fund the construction of a new family business — the Blackberry Ridge Golf Club. It opened in 2001.

The brothers ran the new business before they died within months of each other. Donnie passed

away from cancer in 2009, while Veryl died 10 months later of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The deaths left Linda and Kittie in charge of carrying on the family business.

"When Kittie and I go to the golf course owners conferences, the national ones, the majority are struggling," Linda said. "We have not seen that.

We are doing better than we have in the past."

Kittie said the family's decision to include an events center with the golf course may have helped the business cope with economic downturns.

"When we first thought about events, we questioned whether we wanted to go there, bringing on a bigger entity and was that really a wise choice," Kittie said. "But in order to survive, our events have brought us through the down times of golf."

Linda said she is confident that Kittie and Wes will continue to build on Blackberry Ridge's success story.

"The golf course has allowed us to be more involved in the city," Linda said, pointing out that the new Sartell High School is being built on land the Fenlasons sold to fund the golf course's construction. "I want them to continue that, and I know they will continue outreach to the community."