

**CATHY WURZER:** It's Minnesota Now-- I'm Cathy Wurzer. More than a million frontline workers have applied for hero pay from the state. We'll find out when they might get paid and how much. And is your neighborhood buying extra police patrols? We'll ask an expert how this is affecting public safety in Minneapolis.

Paul Huttner is here with a look at drought conditions and the forecast. Are we officially counting down to the state fair? You bet we are, and we're talking crop art today. You have a little hankering for some vintage brass band music? You're in luck today-- we'll find out where you can find it this weekend.

All that plus the song of the day, and the Minnesota Music Minute.

All of that coming your way right after the news.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** Live from NPR News in Washington, I'm Lakshmi Singh. The nation's leading manufacturers of assault-style weapons have raked in more than \$1 billion in revenue over the last decade. Today, the House Oversight Committee is asking the CEOs of two major gun-makers pointed questions about their business practices.

NPR'S Windsor Johnston reports one is head of Daniel Defense, maker of the weapon used to kill 19 schoolchildren and two teachers in May.

**WINDSOR JOHNSTON:** The committee asked CEO, Marty Daniel, whether he bears any personal responsibility for the attack on Robb Elementary School.

**MARTY DANIEL:** I believe these murders are local problems that have to be solved locally.

**WINDSOR JOHNSTON:** To the CEO of Sturm Ruger, Christopher Killoy, same question. His company made the assault-style weapon used to kill 26 people at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas in 2017.

**CHRISTOPHER KILLOY:** The evil person who perpetrated those crimes and committed those murders was allowed to buy a firearm that frankly he should not have been allowed to do.

**WINDSOR JOHNSTON:** The panel also called out gun manufacturers for deceptive marketing campaigns crafted to entice young men. Windsor Johnston, NPR News, Washington.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** Seattle is opening cooling centers for residents as a heat wave sweeps the Pacific Northwest. From member station, KUOW, Ann Dornfeld has the latest.

**ANN DORNFELD:** Seattle is expected to have highs in the 90s all week. Unhealthy levels of smog are also in the forecast. At Rainier Beach community center, kids cooled off under a hose.

This is one of the few Seattle community centers with air conditioning, because the city used to get hot only rarely.

**RACHEL SHULKIN:** Not what people thought about when they built those community centers.

**ANN DORNFELD:** Parks Department spokesperson Rachel Shulkin says the city is putting A/C in community centers from now on, because Seattle summers now get extremely hot as a rule, not an exception. For NPR News, I'm Ann Dornfeld in Seattle.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** The cost of financing credit card purchases or a home is expected to go up again if the Federal Reserve ends its two-day policy meeting today with another interest rate hike-- a 3/4 of a percentage point increase is widely expected. The Fed's goal is to rein in soaring prices without going as far as triggering a recession.

Some economists say we may need recession to cool down inflation. Claudia Sahm, a senior fellow at the Jain Family Institute says, the Fed has tools to cause a recession if it wanted to, but it doesn't.

**CLAUDIA SAHM:** It's extremely hard to read. It's hard to even understand where the economy is right now, let alone where it is headed. And so, and the Federal Reserve policy takes some time to work its way through the economy. So they really have a tough road ahead of them.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** That's Claudia Sahm, a former Federal Reserve economist speaking with NPR. You're listening to NPR'S News.

The Department of Justice is accusing a Pennsylvania mortgage company, owned by billionaire Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, of discriminating against Black and Latino prospective homebuyers in some places. The DOJ says it's reached a settlement with Trident.

The DOJ accuses the firm of intentionally turning away from predominantly minority neighborhoods in West Philadelphia, Camden, New Jersey, and Wilmington, Delaware, where it could have written mortgages, but didn't. As part of the agreement, Trident reportedly agreed to set aside \$20 million for loans in underserved communities.

A new report from Amnesty International accuses the Taliban of rolling back the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan since the group seized power nearly a year ago. Here's NPR'S Daa Hadid.

**DIAA HADID:** Amnesty laid out how a series of violations have worked in tandem to make women and girls in Afghanistan poorer, more vulnerable to domestic violence, and early marriage. Those violations include banning most girls from secondary school, informally banning most women from jobs, banning women from traveling without a male guardian, and shutting down shelters for women fleeing domestic violence.

Some of those women were left homeless, others were imprisoned, others are missing, some returned to their abusers, and as Amnesty documented, it's allowed individual commanders to pressure vulnerable women into marriage. Amnesty is calling on the international community not to forget the plight of Afghan women. Daa Hadid, NPR News, Islamabad.

**LAKSHMI SINGH:** On Wall Street, the Dow is up more than 100 points at 31,873. I'm Lakshmi Singh, NPR News in Washington.

**ANNOUNCER:** Support for NPR comes from NPR stations. Other contributors include DuckDuckGo, a privacy company committed to making privacy online simple. Used by tens of millions. They offer private search and tracker blocking with one download. DuckDuckGo-- privacy simplified.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

Around Minnesota right now, skies are mostly sunny. It's a practically perfect day today. Highs will be in the lower 70s to the lower 80s.

Right now in downtown Grand Marais, it's 52. At the Grand Marais airport, it's 70. 68 in Elbow Lake, and outside the all washed up car wash in Saint James, Minnesota, it's sunny and 77.

I'm Cathy Wurzer with Minnesota news headlines.

A federal judge today has sentenced former Minneapolis police officer J. Alexander Kueng to three years in prison for violating George Floyd's civil rights. Kueng was convicted in federal court in February of failing to provide medical aid to Floyd. He was also convicted of failing to intervene with his former colleague, Derek Chauvin, when Chauvin killed Floyd by kneeling on his neck for about nine minutes.

Kueng's former colleague and co-defendant, Tou Thao, was also sentenced to 42 months in federal prison. The judge recommending he serve time in Duluth or South Dakota.

The city of Hopkins is asking people to stay away from the area of 21st Avenue North, just south of Highway 7, as crews are battling a fire after a house apparently exploded this morning. Hopkins police say it was reported at about 10:15. Rescue crews are still on the scene.

Authorities in Southern Minnesota say they have arrested two men following a drive by shooting in Janesville. Tim Nelson has more.

**TIM NELSON:**

The Waseca County Sheriff's Office said the incident happened shortly after 3:00 PM in downtown Janesville. KEYC TV reported witnesses saw gunfire erupt between two vehicles near Main and 1st Streets, then one of the vehicles sped away. The person driving the other car was apparently hit by the gunfire, lost control and crashed into the post office a block away.

The shooting victim was airlifted to a hospital for medical treatment. Sheriff's deputies and Waseca police located the suspect vehicle and arrested two men and recovered a gun. Officials say the two suspects are likely to face attempted murder charges.

Janesville police told KEYC that none of the people involved were from that community. I'm Tim Nelson.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

We now know that nearly 1.2 million Minnesotans applied for hero pay. That's the money frontline workers can get from the state for working through the pandemic. Back in April, the legislature agreed on \$500 million to be split equally between people working in 15 specific job sectors. But when will folks' applications be approved, and when will they get that money?

Well, to answer some of our questions about what comes next, now that the hero pay application process has closed, is Nicole Blissenbach, she's the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries deputy commissioner. Commissioner Blissenbach, welcome.

**NICOLE  
BLISSENBACH:**

Thank you, thank you so much for having me.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

It's a pretty big number, 1.2 million people. What were the original estimates for applications?

**NICOLE** The original estimates were really not-- we didn't have an original estimate. We knew that there were a lot of  
**BLISSENBACH:** people that worked on the front lines, but many of the eligibility criteria in the law made it very hard to estimate who would apply and who would be eligible.

So our focus right now is taking these almost 1.12 million applications and processing them through our verification checks.

**CATHY** Why do you think so many people applied?  
**WURZER:**

**NICOLE** Well, I think it just shows us the sheer number of people who showed up, went to work at increased risk of  
**BLISSENBACH:** contracting COVID-19 in the workplace, increased risk to their family, to do the things that we needed them to do to deliver health care to our fellow Minnesotans, to make sure people were fed and cared for during the pandemic.

**CATHY** By the way, can you remind us who exactly qualified for these payments?  
**WURZER:**

**NICOLE** I sure can. There were a number of eligibility criteria in the law. The first was that you needed to be employed in  
**BLISSENBACH:** one of the identified 15 frontline sectors. There was an unemployment insurance benefit threshold that you needed to be under. So you had to receive less than 21 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits, or more than 20 weeks.

There was an adjusted gross income threshold that you needed to fall under, depending on your circumstances. And some eligibility criteria related to the type of work. So you needed to be unable to work telework status, and you needed to be in close proximity to people outside of your home for at least 120 hours during the peacetime emergency.

**CATHY** What does the Department think? How many of these folks might be approved for the payments?  
**WURZER:**

**NICOLE** That's really hard to tell at this juncture. We're in the process of running all of the successfully submitted  
**BLISSENBACH:** applications through our verification checks-- which are really happening with a number of different agencies. DEED is working on one aspect of the verification related to the unemployment insurance threshold. The Department of Revenue is related is running verification related to the adjusted gross income threshold. And we at the Department of Labor and Industry are running verification checks related to the employment eligibility.

**CATHY** So when you look at the \$500 million, and I know you're winnowing down the pool here, if more people are  
**WURZER:** approved of course, they'll each share a smaller portion of the money, right?

**NICOLE** That is how the legislation is set up.  
**BLISSENBACH:**

**CATHY** That's correct. Just generally speaking, you want to take a wild guess, how much do you expect the payments to  
**WURZER:** be, generally speaking?

**NICOLE** I really don't know at this point. I mean, we will have a better understanding after we get the denials out and  
**BLISSENBACH:** people have the opportunity to appeal. And after those appeals are processed, we'll know how many people are in that ultimate pool of eligible applicants.

**CATHY** And there is an appeals process?  
**WURZER:**

**NICOLE** There is. That's really what we're focusing on right now is getting these applications through the verification  
**BLISSENBACH:** checks and identifying the applications that will receive a denial. When that denial is received, there will be an opportunity for the applicant to appeal the denial and provide additional information as to why they believe the denial is an error. And that appeals period, as set forth in the legislation, is 15 days.

**CATHY** OK, now we're at the end of July, do you have an idea of when folks might hear back about whether or not their  
**WURZER:** application has been accepted and they're on their way to maybe getting some money?

**NICOLE** Yeah, so the next people will hear from the frontline worker pay program is we expect that to happen right  
**BLISSENBACH:** around the-- sorry, August 16. That's our anticipated appeals timeline would be August 16 through August 31. And what people will hear hopefully on that August 16 date is either that their application is in progress, and no further information is needed from them, or their application has been denied for one reason or another. And in order to have their application continued for consideration, they would need to file a timely appeal.

**CATHY** By the way, is there anything that folks can do who meet the requirements-- they're listening right now, perhaps,  
**WURZER:** and they think, oh, nuts, I missed the deadline?

**NICOLE** There's not, unfortunately. The legislation did set a 45-day application period, and the legislation is very clear  
**BLISSENBACH:** that we at the Department of Labor and Industry cannot accept applications after that 45-day window.

**CATHY** By the way, when you look at this program, you created it from whole cloth. There has been nothing quite like  
**WURZER:** this in Minnesota before. How much of a lift has this been for DEED to get it up and off the ground?

**NICOLE** Well, so DLI is running the administration, so the Department of Labor and Industry, but we have been working in  
**BLISSENBACH:** very close coordination with the Department of Revenue, DEED, Minnesota IT Services, as well as our vendor. So it's been a big lift. We were able to get the application started 20 working days after the legislation was signed into law by the governor-- which, I think, is a timeline that we knew we could do, and this successful application period is evidence that we were able to do it.

And it's been a big success so far. But it has been a big lift.

**CATHY** All right. I appreciate your time and for the information, too. Thank you so much.  
**WURZER:**

**NICOLE** Thank you so much for having me.  
**BLISSENBACH:**

**CATHY** Nicole Blissenbach is the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries deputy commissioner.  
**WURZER:**

Well, I think it's time for some music. It's our Minnesota Music Minute.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

This is "Superficial Dedication," from Minneapolis musician, EVV-- a mix of blues, jazz, and rock. EVV doesn't claim a genre. He'll be at the 7th Street entry, August 27th.

[MUSIC - "SUPERFICIAL DEDICATION," EVV] (SINGING) Only worry about a good time, we only talk about the future it was a dream. I'm not here for anything but your superficial dedication.

Can you hear me? Are you listening?

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

Clearly I wasn't listening to my producer when she pronounced the name. It's actually EVV-- it's musician EVV-- OK? EVV-- EVV will be at the 7th Street entry August 27.

12:16 here in Minnesota Now from MPR News. I'm Cathy Wurzer. Thanks for being with us.

Can you buy peace of mind? Some Minneapolis neighborhoods are trying to do just that. The Minneapolis Police Department's buyback program allows organizations, sports teams, or neighborhoods to buy extra overtime police patrols. But the program has been criticized as inequitable, and further stretching the department's resources at a time when some less wealthy neighborhoods say police are totally unresponsive.

Michelle Phelps is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. She's also working on a book about policing in Minneapolis. Professor, welcome back to Minnesota Now. How have you been?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

I'm good, thank you for having me.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

Thanks for being here.

Let's see now, the Lowry Hill neighborhood in Minneapolis, through a nonprofit, created by the neighborhood's residents, got a contract with the city earlier this year for about \$210,000 in extra police patrols. The Mill district is raising money, about \$30,000 to pay for one additional officer Thursday through Sundays.

I'm curious, what got us here?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

You know, I mean, I think there's a long answer to that question. But we clearly don't have time for that today. But I think the short answer is, what got us here is really all of the tumult of summer 2020, including the coronavirus pandemic, and of course, the police murder of George Floyd.

Since then, there has been a really historic dip in the number of MPD officers, alongside an increase in certain types of violent crime in the city. And I think those two facts together have really pushed neighborhoods that have the economic wherewithal to try and figure out how they can enhance the feeling of safety for their residents.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

What is to be made of this? The neighborhoods that don't have as many resources say, well, wait a minute. What about us? What about that?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

That's right. You know, I mean, there's lots of ways that neighborhoods create unequal environments for their residents, right? And I think what is, I think, particularly poignant about this example is that it's funding additional services through the Minneapolis Police Department.

So if we think about the police department as fundamentally a form of redistribution right of services to city residents, then I think there's something really galling to folks about the idea that you can pay for extra city protection-- this thing that is supposed to be guaranteed to all neighborhoods regardless of their ability to pay.

Now, the legal technicalities is that's not quite right because it's this buyback program and not their regular staffing hours. But I think certainly there's a real equity issue here that is created by the unequal ability of some neighborhoods to be able to fund these kinds of services.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

On the other side of the coin, though, I can see if private security, say, patrols a neighborhood, the police department has more resources to focus its attention on high-crime neighborhoods. But this is not where we're talking about, this is through the MPD.

And they say this buyback program, which I think has been in place for about 20 years, is another way for the Minneapolis Police to target crime trends in some hotspots. Again, what are the problems with that?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

Right, so I think there's two things that's a little bit difficult to wrap the brain around. I mean, the first is that because MPD is at this historic low level of staff, they are running their officers through a tremendous amount of overtime. But at the same time, there's been this real push for police reform, and for better standards around officer use of force and officer accountability.

And one of the initiatives under that reform agenda is to cap officer overtime. Because we know that officers who work those longer shifts and those longer weeks are more prone to commit misconduct while on duty. And so I think one of the questions that city council and others are asking is if MPD is stretched to capacity with its current force size, if they're stretching the capacity of their officers overtime, then why is it that officers have time in their schedules to do this off-duty work?

And it actually wasn't-- I tried to look up the regulations on this, it wasn't clear to me if the new caps on overtime in MPD policy covered these buyback programs, which are both considered off-duty work, but also officers are in uniform and they're paid through their MPD-- their funding goes through-- routed through the MPD. So it's this in-between this non-MPD and MPD funded.

And so I think there's a real question about where are these hours coming from? And are they at the expense of having officers available to do this overtime work in the department, or at the expense of officers being well rested?

The only thing I'll say on the other side of the equation, though, is that this is a relatively small number of hours, this is a relatively small amount relative to the funding of the MPD. And a relatively small number of the overtime hours that officers are logging. So I don't think it's likely to have these sort of big macro-level effects given the scale.

But I do think people are right to be wondering, how is there time for this when there seems to be no time for regular duties?

**CATHY**

**WURZER:**

I wonder though, you know-- and you know this, too, with your research-- the UK is using private police to supplement their law enforcement services. And this has happened across the US, too-- Oakland, California, some neighborhoods are hiring private security to patrol their neighborhoods because of a rise in crime.

Do you think that Minneapolis might be going in that direction, using private sources, perhaps, because the MPD staff is stretched too thin?

**MICHELLE**

**PHELPS:**

So private security has always existed sort of alongside formal, state-run policing systems. And I think certainly one of the things that we're seeing in the post-2020 world is sort of a turn towards those alternatives. And sometimes that looks like-- if we think about the phrase alternatives rather than private security, we can think about things like the new behavioral crisis response teams as an alternative, we can think about violence interruption work as alternatives to police, we can think about private security.

But we can also think about things like community patrols. And I think what we've seen is a real explosion of interest in all of those different alternative forms, including expanding sort of traditional private security. If you go downtown, for instance, there has long been private security visible in certain commercial spaces in the city. I think, certainly, neighborhoods are turning more to that today in the wake of everything that we've seen since summer of 2020.

But it's by no means a new phenomenon. And I think the idea of turning to alternatives to police is much broader than thinking about just, OK, well, why don't we replace the cop with this private security?

And because there are so many of these different forms, we really don't have a lot of research yet on which ones are most effective. And when we say, most effective, I think part of the question is, what is the thing you're trying to fix, right? Do you mean effectiveness in terms of impact on certain kinds of crime rates? Do you mean effectiveness in terms of preventing police contact, or preventing police violence?

Do you mean effectiveness in terms of addressing some of the deeper issues that lead to police contact? Or that lead to security issues? I think all of those suggest different answers about which alternatives might be the most successful.

**CATHY**

**WURZER:**

You may have touched on this at the beginning of the conversation just a little bit-- do you see any connection between the defund the police movement and this push to install more of these police patrols?

**MICHELLE**

**PHELPS:**

You know, I think what we're seeing-- in summer 2020, the attention was really on police violence. There were these historic protests, mass mobilization in response to the murder of George Floyd. And so the salience of police violence was really high profile to people in the community.

I think we're in a different context now, two years later, where victimization in the community not at the hands of police officers, but at the hands of other residents, is much more salient to folks. And I don't think that you can draw a clean line between calls to defund the police and the rise and exposure to things like homicide and shootings in the cities-- in no small part because Minneapolis didn't, in fact, defund the police in any significant way, right? We saw reductions in the number of officers, but that wasn't because their funding was radically reduced.

But I think what you can say is that there was sort of a crisis of faith in policing in summer 2020. And that that, together with all of the reverberations of the pandemic, have had a lot of fall-down consequences, including the rise in certain kinds of victimization, and including the decline and the number of MPD officers. But also including the expansion of all of these city run, and privately run, and community based alternatives to police that I think are just getting started, but have the seeds of potential of thinking about a way to get out of this bind of being continually ping-ponging between attention on police victimization, and attention on community victimization and framing police as the logical solution to that victimization.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

In my intro, I mentioned that you're writing this book. And this is a book that's following the political struggle over the Minneapolis Police Department from about what, 2015 to 2022. When you look at that timeframe, what do you see when you look at the way the department and the city have changed over that time?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

I joke that as a sociologist, there's no question that I can't answer with the answer, yes, no, it depends. And I think the answer to the question of what changed in Minneapolis, that's really a core of my book project. And the answer is, everything and nothing.

I mean, I think the political conversation around who the MPD are, and what functions they serve in our community was radically altered in summer 2020. And on the other hand, here we find ourselves again in this conversation of crime is on the rise in communities, and so therefore, the answer is, we need more police, so we will pay privately for the police.

And so in some ways, it feels like this conversation-- which in the book I call the politics of policing-- that we're sort of trapped in this loop. And you can go way farther back than just Jamal Clark in 2015, and you can go all the way back to the unrest in 1967, or even farther back in Minneapolis's history, to find these examples of these moments where police violence-- particularly against Black residents-- is particularly salient.

And then these moments where the narrative gets flipped again, and we're back trying to build up the force. And what I'm cautiously optimistic about in Minneapolis is that the sort of seeds that are being planted by these years of mobilization, by these years of conversations and investigations and reforms, is this parallel process of really trying to create some accountability inside of MPD for officer misconduct, and outside of MPD in the court systems.

But also, trying to think about how do we step outside of this seemingly never endless revolving door of outrage and reform, and then tell the next wave of outrage, by thinking about how do we create safety in more deeper and long-lasting interventions and communities?

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

Well, when the book comes out, you'll have to be back. Is that OK?

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

I would love to. Yeah, thank you.

**CATHY  
WURZER:**

Excellent. Professor, thanks for your time right now.

**MICHELLE  
PHELPS:**

Sure thing. Have a good rest of your day.

**CATHY** You, too. Michelle Phelps is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota.

**WURZER:**

**ANNOUNCER:** Programming is supported by Little Moments Count-- helping raise public awareness and inspiring action about early childhood brain development among parents-- to help ensure a strong start and a bright future for all babies. [LittleMomentsCount.org](http://LittleMomentsCount.org).

Programming is supported by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, presenting Reflections on Reality-- drawings and paintings from the Weissberg Collection. Intimate artwork showing the everyday lives of people most vulnerable to the whims of the powerful, at [ArtsMIA.org](http://ArtsMIA.org).

**CATHY** Around the region it is a beautiful day with temperatures in the 60s and 70s, except for Grand Marais-- 54 degrees in Grand Marais. That is in downtown Grand Marais. If you're at the Grand Marais airport, it's 72. 79 at Twin Cities international, 75 at the Duluth Harbor, 81 in Red Wing, 77 degrees in Winona, Saint Cloud checks in with a 76 degree temperature reading. It's very nice out there, I hope you're enjoying it.

**WURZER:**

Joining us right now for the news is John Wanamaker, John?

**JOHN** Hi, Cathy. A federal court judge today sentenced two former Minneapolis police officers for violating George  
**WANAMAKER:** Floyd's civil rights. Former officer J Alexander Kueng received a three-year sentence, and Tou Thao will serve a three and a half-year sentence. Both were convicted in federal court in February of failing to provide medical aid to Floyd.

They were also convicted of failing to intervene when their former colleague, Derek Chauvin, killed Floyd by kneeling on his neck for about nine minutes. A third officer, Thomas Lane, received a two and a half-year sentence.

When it ends its latest policy meeting this afternoon, the Federal Reserve is expected to impose a second consecutive 3/4 point hike in its benchmark interest rate, it will be the Fed's fourth rate hike since March. And since then, with inflation setting new four-decade highs, the central bank has tightened credit even more aggressively.

WNBA star, Brittany Griner, testified at her drug possession trial in Russia that an interpreter translated only a fraction of what was said during questioning when she was detained at Moscow's airport in February, and officials told her to sign documents without giving an explanation. In her first testimony, and under questioning from the prosecution, Griner also said she received neither an explanation of her rights nor access to a lawyer.

President Biden has emerged from five days of isolation after contracting coronavirus, telling Americans that COVID isn't gone, but saying, serious illness can be avoided with vaccines, booster shots, and treatments. Biden ended his COVID-19 isolation after testing negative for the virus last night and again this morning.

Biden's physician says the president has completed his course of treatment with a drug, Paxlovid, and remains free of fever. That's 79-year-old Biden tested positive last week and had mild symptoms. This is MPR News.

**CATHY** Thank you, John. Well, this week has been a respite from the intense heat of the past few weeks. It's felt really  
**WURZER:** beautiful. And there's even been a little rain, which is a very good thing. But let's find out if it's enough to bring us out of these drought conditions, especially in Central Minnesota, including the Twin Cities.

Here with the answers is MPR'S chief meteorologist, Paul Huttner. Hey, Paul.

**PAUL** Hey, Cathy, great to talk with you.

**HUTTNER:**

**CATHY** Likewise. It's a beautiful day out there.

**WURZER:**

**PAUL** Oh, yes. Lovely.

**HUTTNER:**

**CATHY** I'm wondering about the rainfall. Now, I mean, I saw the storms pop up last night. It looked like there were some areas that got some pretty decent rain.

**WURZER:**

**PAUL** Yeah, and I would call this the proverbial million-dollar rain. Because this fell just in the sweet spot of really one of the driest areas in Minnesota-- you take from the Twin Cities, back west along Highway 212, and then northwest along I-94, that kind of pie-slice of central Minnesota, one of the driest areas. And we got some great rainfall totals-- those slow-moving thunderstorms, garden variety storms.

**HUTTNER:**

Annandale had 2.2 inches, Long Prairie 2.1, Bird Island, west of the Twin Cities, 2 inches. Glencoe about 1.7, Cold Spring an inch and a half, Hutchinson close to that, 1.4. Carver, southwest of the Twin Cities, 1.3.

As anybody knows, who's driven through that part of Minnesota, that is corn and soybean country, and I know some farmers in Olivia who have been right on the edge of very dry, and they got a good soaking last night. Many of these places did. So that was a very timely rain, very much needed, and comes in a backdrop of Minnesota where we've had spotty rainfall coverage this summer.

I mean, the heaviest areas have been in southeast Minnesota-- they had 4 to 10 inches basically from Rochester southeast over the last 30 days or so. Most of southern Minnesota, that I-90 corridor doing pretty well, OK, 2 to 4 inches in the last month, basically, south of Mankato. And northern Minnesota has been doing pretty well, also.

But it's that central Minnesota area that got the rain last night that really needed it. And Cathy, Twin Cities, this was the fourth driest June and July period on record. So we're in drought here-- we've got severe drought again cropping up from last week's drought report. Twin Cities, southern Twin Cities, southwest down the Minnesota River Valley, and a little moderate drought south and west of that.

But here's the interesting part-- we had that wet spring, so the soils were pretty recharged. The crops are doing OK in most areas. 63% of the corn crop in Minnesota is either good or excellent-- 53% is good, 10% is excellent. About the same with soybeans-- 62%. So crops are hanging in there-- there are pockets of dryness where folks really need some rain in their fields. But overall, we're doing OK on crops this summer.

**CATHY** That's great news. I'm kind of wondering, though, about the forecast for the weekend, into next week, that shows hot, humid weather.

**WURZER:**

**PAUL** Yeah, it looks great into the weekend. As you point out, it is a bluebird day out there, lots of sunshine today.

**HUTTNER:** We're 80 with a dew point of 54 in the Twin Cities. It is comfortable.

And tomorrow will be about 76, so almost a whiff of September tomorrow, with low dew points again. Sunshine Friday, 79. The weekend warms up a bit. A little more Wurzer weather-ish on the weekend-- sunny, breezy, warmer, 87 Saturday, maybe 88, 89 on Sunday for the Twin Cities with a little more humidity and a chance of thunderstorm Sunday afternoon.

It's next week when it looks like that heat dome to the south may nudge back up here again. Forecast models saying, maybe around 90 Monday, Tuesday. But then European and American models saying, well into the 90s about next Wednesday and Thursday. Euros cranking out 98, 99 for the Twin Cities.

We'll see, that could be overdone. And some models saying we could get 100 again in southwest Minnesota next week. So we'll have to keep an eye on that.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Oh, gosh. OK, see, before you go, I was so happy that you went to our friend, Don Shelby's house, former WCCO TV news anchor Don Shelby, who's now retired. And I just, I think he did such a beautiful job with his house, because it is just so energy efficient. And you toured that.

**PAUL**  
**HUTTNER:** I did, and he really put a lot of thought into this, Cathy, as you know. He's a big climate advocate, and kind of put his money where his mouth is in this house. He built it as close to net-zero carbon as he could.

He put in a geothermal system with wells that go down 80 feet, a solar system that has paid for itself over these years, geothermal, as well. And used every board from the old house that was on the property in his new house.

So I went out and interviewed him for Climate Cast, and we had a really nice piece on there. If you go to MPR News, Climate Cast, you'll find that piece from last week. Interesting thing, he's got a statue in his front yard called an Inuk Sook-- I hope I pronounced that right, it's an Inupiat statue that they put for direction finding in the Arctic, because they're so affected by climate change, as well.

And Don has that statue in his front yard basically to say he understands that the Inupiat are so affected by climate change, and that's the reason he built his house the way he did. So it's kind of an interesting piece. It was a pleasure to talk to Don, as always.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** And how is he doing?

**PAUL**  
**HUTTNER:** He's doing great. You may know we've played music for the last 30 years or so, and we're back doing the Blues band thing. So Don is singing well.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Good, I'm glad to hear that. And of course, people can still hear that Climate Cast by going to [MPRNews.org](http://MPRNews.org), click on Climate Cast, right?

**PAUL**  
**HUTTNER:** Yes, absolutely.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Excellent, OK. We'll hear you again this afternoon with our friend, Tom.

**PAUL**  
**HUTTNER:** Thanks. Thanks, Cathy.

**CATHY WURZER:** See you later. That's our MPR News chief meteorologist, Paul Huttner. And yeah, you can hear him later this afternoon with Tom Crann on All Things Considered.

How about a moment of calm for your Wednesday. Earlier this season, producer Ellen Finn went birdwatching with leaders from the Urban Bird Collective and the Lower Phalen Creek Project at Wakan Tipi in East Saint Paul. You can hear leader, Ari Kim, along with birdsong in the sounds of the city.

**ARI KIM:** That's another goldfinch up high. It might be a female.

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, that's a goldfinch? Holy heck.

**ARI KIM:** So they're here year round.

**PARTICIPANT:** I love the goldfinches.

**ARI KIM:** But they get real bright in the breeding season.

**PARTICIPANT:** That thing is-- I mean, woo, shining bright. Cute. The song of the goldfinch.

**ARI KIM:** You'll hear that a lot. I wonder if we're pissing him off.

Oh, I don't hear that one very often. Cardinals, you have robins. You have [INAUDIBLE] and the ducks. You have [INAUDIBLE]. Turkey vultures are migrating birds, so they'll leave in the fall.

I love when you can see the red wing blackbirds, orange and red on the wings when they fly. It's so bright right now.

I find a lot of birds, and that's the only way that I probably am going to learn more. Because I'm still learning, too, is that I find a lot of birds, and I sometimes don't know what they are. And then I could spot them pretty quickly.

**CATHY WURZER:** I couldn't love that any more than I do. That's a little audio postcard of the Urban Bird Collective in the Lower Phalen Creek Project, Birding at Wakan Tipi in East Saint Paul. The group leads birding trips at Wakan Tipi monthly until December, with a focus on LGBTQ and BIPOC birders.

**ANNOUNCER:** Programming is supported by the Abbott Fund-- the foundation of the global health care company, Abbott-- dedicated to helping people build better lives and stronger communities.

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It's that time of year when people around Minnesota are preparing for the Minnesota State Fair. This week on Minnesota Now, we're spotlighting a quintessentially Minnesota art form-- crop art. Sam Stroozas is a digital producer at MPR News. Her current story is about a crop art class that happened over the weekend.

She joins us right now to talk more about the work and the artists who make it. Sam, welcome to Minnesota Now-- it's your debut.

**SAM STROOZAS:** Hi, Cathy, thanks for having me. Yes, I'm very excited.

**CATHY** I'm glad you're here. OK, now, for the uninitiated, what the heck is crop art?

**WURZER:**

**SAM** Yeah, so essentially what it sounds like-- it is creating art out of seeds. So what people will do is trace a design  
**STROOZAS:** with carbon paper and copy that over onto a board. Or they might freehand draw a design that they've had in mind, and then they'll use Elmer's glue to follow along the outline.

And then, they'll use a toothpick to kind of push around seeds and decide where they want their seeds to go, what colors they want to use. Some advanced artists may use tweezers, too. But it's very unique to the Midwest, which makes it all the more special.

**CATHY** OK, this sounds fairly simple, just on the face of it. But I'm guessing it is not.

**WURZER:**

**SAM** That's kind of what I thought going into it. I know the more intricate ones definitely take more time. Someone  
**STROOZAS:** that I spoke to who has been at the state fair a lot spent over 80 hours on one piece, and I don't believe anyone finished that day. We had three hours, and people were about halfway through. But no one walked away with a complete piece.

**CATHY** OK, so you went to this class, and did you attempt to do a piece?

**WURZER:**

**SAM** I did not, myself. It had me thinking that I really should attempt one, to do one. But it was about a dozen people  
**STROOZAS:** at Marine Mills Folk School, at Marine on the Saint Croix. So it's about an hour drive from my apartment. I got there. I go in, there's Bluegrass music playing, John Denver.

And we just start going with the seeds-- people pick out what seeds they want, they had some designs. And some people did free-handed stuff, and then some people just copied over pictures that they had.

**CATHY** I'm wondering, the seeds must be the key to everything, right? To pick the right seeds for what you're doing.

**WURZER:**

**SAM** Yes, so the seeds are basically like the central art form with crop art. But there's only some seeds that are  
**STROOZAS:** actually allowed when you're entering the Minnesota State Fair. So they practice that, regardless, just so people know what is allowed and what's not allowed if they decide to use their pieces.

So the state fair does not allow wild plant seeds, white rice, sesame seeds, or dyed seeds. And all the seeds used have to be from Minnesota-grown crops.

**CATHY** I love the fact that you did a story on crop art where some people were there for the very first time. What did  
**WURZER:** they say about this?

**SAM** Yeah, so a lot of the people there had seen it at the state fair, and they were really excited to work on a hands-on  
**STROOZAS:** activity that they had valued and really admired over the years. I talked to someone who has visited the agriculture and horticulture building they said about 40 times over the last 40 years. They went every year but 2020 with COVID. And they said they were super excited to do it themselves.

Some said it was harder than they thought, some said it was easier. But definitely, a lot of patience and focus and non-shaky hands was key.

**CATHY** That is the key, the non-shaky hands. One of the artists I know that'll be at the fair this year is Liz Schreiber. Can you tell me about her work?

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Yeah, so Liz has won seven first place ribbons at the state fair. She started crop art in 2004 after seeing it in the agriculture and horticulture building like us. And then she kind of just teaches crop art classes on the side-- so she focuses on portraits, she's done the Bride of Frankenstein, Joan Jett. She did a Little Richard portrait-- that was the one that took over 80 hours.

So she'll be making crop art every day at noon in the agriculture and horticulture building with the U of M.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** So I did not know-- I figured that crop art was done in other states, like Iowa, right? But I didn't realize it was really a Minnesota tradition.

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Yeah, so Minnesota says crop art instead of seed art to honor the farmers and localize the angle a little bit more with the type of seeds that are allowed. So people use all different kinds of seeds, but some popular ones are gold flax or red quinoa. And it is the most popular in Minnesota but there is a corn palace in South Dakota that was actually built in 1892 with outer walls that are covered in corn.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Now, Sam, have you seen that, by the way? The corn palace?

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** I have not.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** You must-- you must. It's a bucket list item.

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Yeah, for sure.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** Yeah, so I know you're a fan, so this year you're going to go, and what do you think you might see?

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** Yeah, I have always loved crop art and just going to the State Fair, in general. I go every year with my parents, multiple times. Even though I am from Wisconsin. I just think it's very unique and it represents our state so well. And it's important to thank the farmers who put food on our tables.

And I'm looking forward to seeing pieces about the current political climate and local music icons, like Lizzo, now that her new album has dropped.

**CATHY**  
**WURZER:** I didn't think about that. That would be pretty cool. Sam, we're going to have to, of course, enter something somewhere along the line. That's your next step, you know that, right?

**SAM**  
**STROOZAS:** I think I'll spend the next year maybe trying to perfect seed art on my own.

**CATHY** I can see you doing that. Sam, thank you for the report. Great job.

**WURZER:**

**SAM** Thank you.

**STROOZAS:**

**CATHY** Sam Stroozas is a digital producer at MPR News. You might want to check out the crop art story by going to  
**WURZER:** MPRNews.org.

[MUSIC - "GEORGIA ON MY MIND"]

That, friends, is the Minnesota State Band, which has been around since 1898, playing "Georgia on My Mind." They sound great. They're one of the Minnesota bands playing the Vintage Band Festival in Northfield this Thursday through Sunday. Paul Niemisto is the festival's founder and artistic director.

Paul's on the line. Welcome to the program. How are you?

**PAUL** Oh, hey, hi, good to talk to you, Cathy. You've been a part of my routine every morning for as long as I can  
**NIEMISTO:** remember.

**CATHY** Thank you, I appreciate that, Paul. It's kind of you. I have heard about the Vintage Band Festival, never been. So  
**WURZER:** tell us all about it.

**PAUL** Well, in short, it's a-- I'll define vintage from our standpoint. Perhaps that's the best way to start.  
**NIEMISTO:**

My idea of vintage is that it's not necessarily old-- it might be. In some cases, there are Civil War, over the shoulder type instruments, and old, 19th century type town bands. But vintage is also can be ethnic, or it can be regional.

So we have mariachi bands, and we have German bands, and all kinds of different varieties of things. And so the idea is to get variety, and to get quality. And to do it in a historical setting. And that's our theme, or that's our purpose.

**CATHY** Well, Northfield is a perfect setting.

**WURZER:**

**PAUL** Absolutely. The whole town is a museum.

**NIEMISTO:**

**CATHY** Yeah, no kidding. That's why I think it's a perfect place for this. So, tell me, why do you love vintage music?

**WURZER:** Especially vintage brass band music?

**PAUL** Well, I'm Finnish American, and early on in my academic career-- I just retired from St. Olaf, I got involved in  
**NIEMISTO:** learning about the Finnish American band music that was from up on the Iron Range-- and it got me started. And then from there on, I realized that there is a certain quality to bands playing on-- in most cases, authentic instruments from the period, which have a different sound. They're softer, they're more refined in some ways than the modern versions that are used in a modern concert band.

So it's kind of ghostly. My greatest experience is when we had about five or six over the shoulder tubas playing in a mass band situation about 10 or 15 years ago, and I stood behind them. And it is a sonic experience that I'll never forget.

**CATHY WURZER:** Wow, I can only imagine. So I want to play some more music, if that's OK for folks, we're going to play a Celtic fusion band. This is called Brass Lassie.

[MUSIC - "BRASS LASSIE"]

They got a big sound. Wow, they're playing tomorrow at 6:30, I understand. Is that right, Paul?

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** It's tomorrow night-- I guess that's right. Their founder, or their leader, is Laura McKenzie, who, herself, is a famous Minnesota Celtic artist. She's actually a Northfield native, and there's a lot of things with other Irish and Celtic musicians both from across the pond and also from the area.

**CATHY WURZER:** So the festival has been around for some 16 years. What are the other bands that you're excited to see or to listen to this year?

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Well, because of the COVID situation, we have a whole class of bands that just aren't here. That's because it's high risk to try to buy airline tickets for European groups to come over here-- we don't know whether the flights are going to go or not, or how it's going to be. So we've expanded the American scene a little bit more.

But it's always fun to hear the bands coming in from other parts of the United States, such as Newbury's on the East Coast, and the Independent Silver Band from Illinois. These are classic old bands who really cherish the old traditions and try to keep it going. Dartmouth Band also from Ann Arbor is superb in that regard.

**CATHY WURZER:** I have had the chance to listen to one of the bands playing, Mala Mania, so I want to listen a little bit to them right now. They're making their first appearance this year at the festival.

[MUSIC - MALA MANIA]

Mala Mania, oh, I love them. They're great. Say, Paul, I understand it was a four-day-- go ahead, go ahead.

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Oh, I was going to say, that they're part of a-- I think it's Friday night, which is a Latino night. There's going to be two-- mariachi band, and a [? Banda, ?] which is an amazingly [INAUDIBLE], and then Mala Mania-- Mala Mania is Afro-Caribbean, or Afro-American, so we tried to have a representation of these ethnic groups as much as we possibly can, and we're really happy to have them.

**CATHY WURZER:** So last year's festival, if I'm not mistaken, was just a day. It's a four-day festival this year, which is the first since the pandemic, right?

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Right, we pull that off about every three or four years. The board of directors is all volunteer-- amazingly capable people. But it takes about three or four years to amass the momentum to get another four-day festival in place. But the community here will not put up with us not having anything, so on the off-years, we have a one-day festival. And there's always Minnesotans sort of bands that will come and play, and everybody's happy.

**CATHY** Now, Paul, do you play an instrument?

**WURZER:**

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** I am a trombonist, originally, and I play euphonium, and I am in the Finnish American septet that's called Boys of America, which is also going to be playing this weekend.

**CATHY** And what does Finnish American brass music sound like, just generally speaking?

**WURZER:**

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Polkas, [INAUDIBLE], waltzes, tangos--

**CATHY** Tangos?

**WURZER:**

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Oh, there's a whole story. How much time do you have? The deep Arctic of Finland, the tango came, and it changed the personality of the entire population. They are tango freaks. And they are shy, receding, quiet, until there's a tango on, and then they are animated and erotic, and otherwise totally different.

**CATHY** There is a story there, I'm telling you. Paul, I appreciate your time. I think this is going to be a great festival this weekend, I wish you well. Thank you.

**WURZER:**

**PAUL NIEMISTO:** Hey, thanks for having me on. I really appreciate it.

**NIEMISTO:**

**CATHY** Absolutely. Paul Niemisto is the founder and artistic director of the Vintage Band Festival in Northfield. It's this weekend, actually starting tomorrow night. And it is free. Check out their website. You can also find out more information by going to [ExploreMinnesota.com](http://ExploreMinnesota.com).

**WURZER:**

Say, before we go, before we go, I want to give a little shout out to a stalwart in the MPR newsroom-- Tim Pugmire has spent nearly 32 years playing the craft, plying the craft of radio journalism, 17 of those years at the State Capitol, in the Capitol newsroom in the basement there. Don't know how many committee hearings and floor sessions he's sat through, and he's done it with evenhanded fairness, grace, and gentle good humor. You need that covering politics.

Tim's going to be missed, but he's earned his retirement. Our heartfelt gratitude to a guy who's among the very best. Thank you, Tim Pugmire. And thanks for listening to Minnesota Now.