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Benson filled the mold with a mixture of resin and taconite tailings. Ruth Koepke added that alphabet soup noodles spelled out “ROCKY TACONITE” on the little man’s helmet.

Dr. Ringle said the exact resin recipe has been lost to time, but “Marie put them in her oven, and when they were hard, she attached the spring, connecting the head to the body, and [the Ringles’] kids went to work painting.”

Mrs. Benson’s kitchen-based bobble-head factory closed long ago, but new versions carried on her legacy. Ruth Koepke said, “We have had trouble getting anybody in our country to make them, and she made them in her kitchen.” The originals are now quite valuable—when you can find them.

At all-class reunions during the annual Bay Days festival, students of all ages want Rocky statues. Bobbleheads have traveled the world, ridden on a camel (on one of Ruth’s vacations), and attended the first event at US Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

Bobbleheads are not the only place you’ll see Rocky’s face, though. Blue banners around Silver Bay say “Rocky Welcomes You” above a depiction of the smiling statue. Rocky has also appeared on pins, buttons, bumper stickers, plates, bookmarks, and spoons. Inside the Silver Bay tourist center, which also serves as the Bay Area Historical Society’s museum, coffee mugs, hats, sweatshirts, and baby onesies are for sale. Rocky also lends his name to baseball and hockey tournaments and snowmobiles rides.

“Dr. Ringle was so thankful that we carried out the theme with T-shirts, mugs, and other souvenirs,” Ruth said. Otto Ringle currently lives in Walker, where he has designed even more statues.

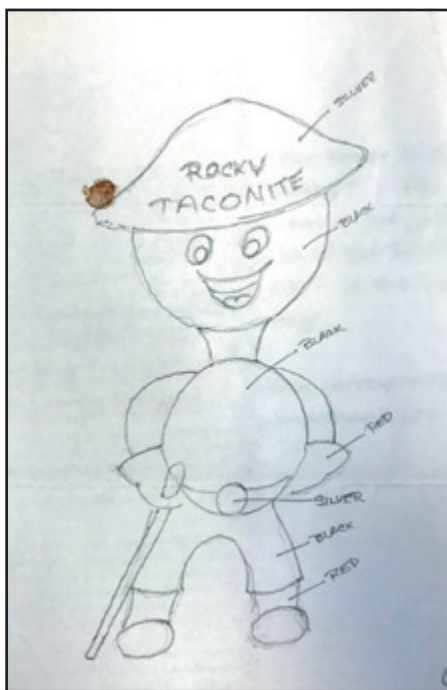
Shannon Krohn, who works at the tourist center, calls Rocky “The original man of steel.” Her husband, Randy, turned an old ping-pong table into a cutout of Rocky that greets tourist center guests.

Rocky Taconite has a social media presence, although he seems to be on hiatus. His Facebook posts were often written in verse, and the educated edifice offered commentary on the weather and Rocky memorabilia.

Mayor Wade LeBlanc is proud to have Rocky greet visitors to the community.

“It’s a great part of the history of Silver Bay,” he stated. “It used to be up in the shopping center, then it got moved down by the clinic. I think that’s a better spot for it. He’s a lot more visible. There are always people taking pictures by him.”

When the federal government sued Reserve Mining in the 1970s after the



Dr. Otto F. Ringle, a dentist and new resident of Silver Bay, made this sketch in 1960 of what became Rocky Taconite. The statue was funded by Reserve Mining Company, which is now Cleveland-Cliffs’ Northshore Mining.

company’s taconite tailings had polluted Lake Superior and North Shore drinking water, Rocky’s popularity waned. The company later changed how it deposited tailings, and despite idles and changes in mine ownership, Rocky is still a celebrated citizen.

“He’s gaining in popularity the older he gets,” LeBlanc added.

The mayor said Rocky wears a Silver Bay Mariners jersey during Homecoming every fall, and he dons a scarf and hat in winter. After all, a hardhat offers little protection from harsh Lake Superior winds.

Rocky is cared for by the City of Silver Bay and received a fresh coat of paint a few years ago.

As the tourism and recreation industries have grown along the North Shore and as the mining industry continues evolving, Rocky Taconite keeps smiling. He serves as a tribute to the innovation that saved mining in Minnesota, and even young children who don’t fully understand Rocky’s significance love posing with Rocky and often mimic his outstretched arms.

“You wouldn’t believe how many people you see standing there taking pictures by him,” Ruth Koepke said. “Rocky is our mascot and our friend.”

Tucker Nelson lives in Virginia with his wife, stepson, and cats. When he isn’t visiting statues of anthropomorphic taconite pellets, he can be reached at tucker@htfnews.us.



The Lincoln Parent Teacher Organization (LPTO) in Hibbing recently gifted Lincoln Elementary with \$5,000 towards a social-emotional learning curriculum to support youth mental health. LPTO president Alex Stene said, “Is student mental health something you or your organization feel passionate about? We invite you to take part in a community challenge to match our donation! Contact us at lincolnpthibbing@gmail.com if you are interested in participating!” Pictured (l. to r.) are LPTO co-treasurer Erin Shay, LPTO president Alex Stene, and Lincoln Elementary principal Bob Bestul. Submitted photo.

Handgun training offered August 21

AURORA — On The Range Handgun Training will be holding a Minnesota Permit to Carry class Sunday, August 21, at 9 a.m. at the East Range Sportsmen’s and Conservation Club (ERSCC) clubhouse, 5610 Forestry Rd. in Aurora.

The class, led by ERSCC treasurer and

membership coordinator Gyle Swentik, will last three to four hours, and the cost is \$50. To learn more about this training or the East Range Sportsmen’s and Conservation Club, contact Swentik at 218-780- 8993 or email gomer8993@gmail.com.

Trinity Lutheran to offer free meal

COOK — Trinity Lutheran Church in Cook will host a drive-through meal Thursday, August 25 from 4 – 6 p.m. The meal will be

Zup’s brats, beans, chips, and dessert. Trinity offers free, public meals once a month. The church is located at 231 2nd St. E.

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