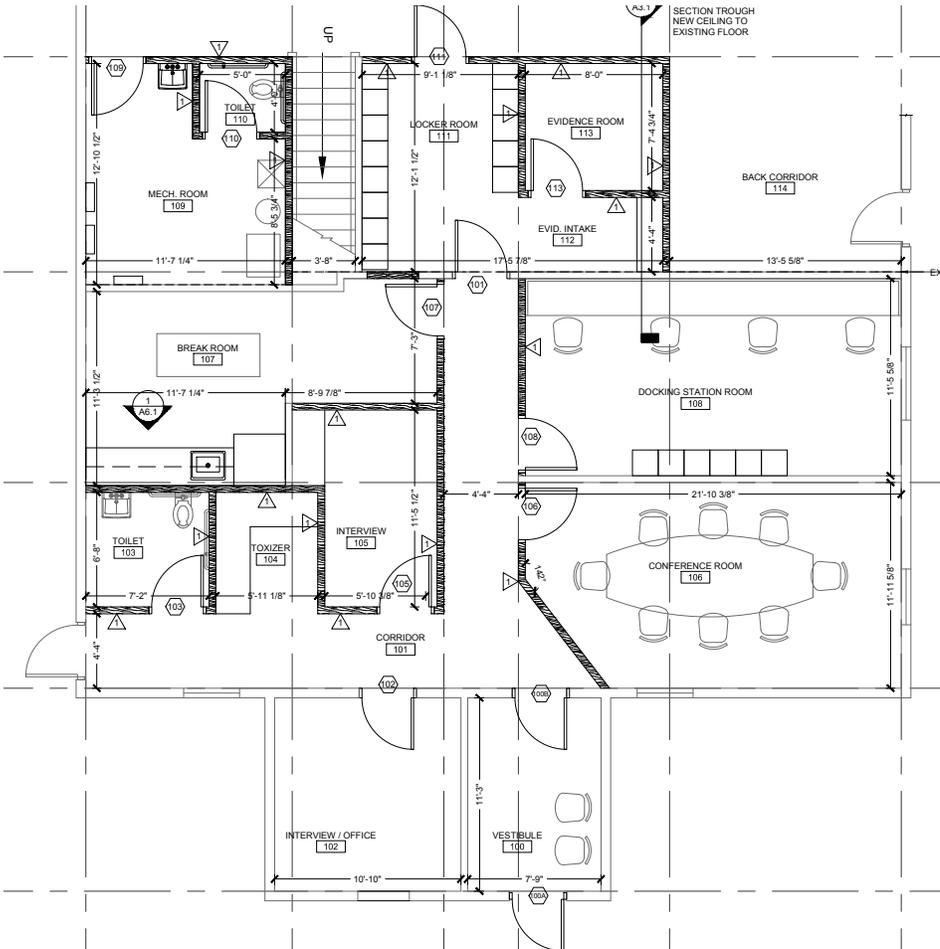


# POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2016



Space in Stenberg Building to be developed for Sheriff's Department office

## Sheriff to have E. Polk satellite

The Polk County Sheriff's Office will have a new base of operations for its work on the "east end" of the county starting later this summer when space in the county-owned Stenberg Building in Fosston is developed into a satellite office.

"Deputies who cover the east end of the county will work from there," Sheriff Barb Erdman notes. "This will fulfill a great need, providing additional office and storage space. We will have interview rooms and work areas with the updated technology

necessary for deputies to complete case reports and forward them electronically into our main office, to the County Attorney's Office and to the courts.

"There will be garage space including a 'sally port,' which will allow for secure access to the office and provide a safe environment when testing is done for DUI's as well as our day-to-day operations. We'll have a conference room and there will be a locker room for deputies.

See SATELLITE OFFICE, Page 3

## Solid Waste expansion project enters second round

### State Funding:

Polk County applied in 2013 for a Capital Assistance Program Grant (CAP Grant) from the State of Minnesota for funding of a regional solid waste expansion project to provide for the addition, replacement or expansion of various components of the regional solid waste programs.

The CAP Grant application was made on behalf of the counties of Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Mahnomon, Norman and Polk.

The application made for the 2014 Bonding Bill was unsuccessful. However, a separate bill that was introduced by Sen. Stumpf (D-Plummer) in the Senate and by Rep. Kiel (R-Crookston) in the House in 2015 was successful.

The 2015 Bonding Bill was considered small, and our applying counties were asked if the project could be split into 2 phases – Phase I awarded in 2015 with a Phase II to be awarded in 2016. The counties agreed and received \$8 million in CAP

See SOLID WASTE, Page 2

## About Your taxes

Polk County Director of Assessment Services (assessor) Robert Wagner explains in simple terms on Pages 5-7 of this newsletter how the valuation of properties is established as a part of the process of determining the amount of your property tax.

Introduced on Page 8 are the Assessment Services staff members... the people who might come knocking on your door or otherwise be making an onsite visit to view your property as a part of the appraisal process.

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# Solid Waste expansion project

Continued from Page 1

funding in the Bonding Bill approved in the 2015 Special Session.

Following the 2015 Special Session, the counties were placed on the Legislative Capital Investment Committee's 2016 Bonding Project Tour. Both the House and Senate Capital Investment Committees — along with representatives of the governor's office — scheduled tours of the Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in Fosston during the summer/fall of 2015.

The RRF is the central component of the regional solid waste management system, and upon which all other portions of the CAP Project are intended to compliment. A high turnout for these tours was experienced and the consensus of those who helped with the tours on behalf of the counties was that there was a sense of interest and support for the project.

## The Project:

The CAP Grant sought to make major upgrades to the regional solid waste system utilized by the counties. This included the following:

- Expansion of the tip floor and upgrade of processing equipment at the RRF,
- New transfer stations in Bemidji (Beltrami Co.), Park Rapids (Hubbard Co.) and Crookston (Polk Co.),
- New organic compost facility at the Polk County Landfill, and,
- Other smaller facility modifications if funding allows.

Each component of the project has a unique state cost-share ratio, some projects are 3:1 others 1:1 and some 1:3 (ratio = state funds to local funds).

Phase I was appropriated at \$8 million in state funds. Phase I of the project called for the tip floor and equipment upgrade at the RRF, construction of the Beltrami Transfer Station in Bemidji, and the bulk of the design/engineering of all Phase I and II CAP Projects.

The balance of the CAP Projects are now designated as Phase II. This undertaking proved a bit tricky — and provided some controversy.

## Status of Phase I:

Despite Phase I funding being awarded by the 2015 Legislature, the counties still had to follow the process of securing and gaining release of those funds from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Minnesota Management & Budget (MMB).

Although the process seems rather routine and a formality, it has proved to be anything but routine.

With re-worked application in-hand, representatives of the counties traveled to MPCA headquarters in St. Paul for a

unique meeting with the principals at MPCA who would be dealing with all aspects of our project. The intent was to streamline the process, get all parties talking and on the same agenda/timeline and move the project along quickly and efficiently. The meeting went well and an aggressive, but realistic, timeline was decided upon in which construction would occur in 2016.

The agreed upon timeline for our CAP Grant application approval (Jan. 1, 2016) was significant because design/engineering work cannot start until approvals is granted. The EAW release is also critical because we need to construct a new solid waste cell at the landfill this summer and the EAW needs to be completed before our landfill permit can be reissued. The compost portion of the CAP Project is also dependent upon the landfill permit.

Unfortunately, the CAP Grant application was hung up in the MPCA well into February 2016 and similar delays at the MMB for getting funds released arose into March 2016.

One of the reasons for the delay at MPCA was the emergence of opposition to the Beltrami County component of the project by a large waste management corporation.

This opposition took the form of meddling in the application process and repeated attempts to lobby legislators, governor's staff and agency staff to adversely impact both the Phase I funding appropriated and Phase II funds sought in 2016.

Despite Beltrami County's attempts to reassure that corporation that it would honor existing contracts and would hold a special meeting to consider their proposals and reach a compromise, efforts to derail the project are ongoing by that waste management corporation.

The MPCA/MMB approval has finally been received. The contract called for an effective date of March 16th after which the counties may begin incurring eligible expenses.

However, because the counties entered into early March with no final design/engineering activities having been completed, the likelihood of a 2016 construction pro-

ject at the RRF is in jeopardy. This will likely result in added costs above and beyond the funding appropriated by the state — which will be therefore borne by the counties.

Likewise, the EAW was released by the MPCA on March 7th. Polk has been reassured that the EAW delay will not impact the permit for new cell construction at the landfill and we can still hit a June 2016 construction date.

## Status of Phase II:

Phase II funds are anticipated to be appropriated as part of the final 2016 Bonding Bill. Although the project was not included in the Preliminary 2016 Governors' Bonding Budget, it is hoped that it will be included in the Governors' Supplemental Bonding Budget and likewise included in both the House and Senate versions of the 2016 Bonding Bill.

Aside from the one lone voice of opposition, the project generally is viewed positively by those informed of the details, goals and intentions of it. The counties therefore are expecting that Phase II funding will be received in 2016 and are preparing as such.

In conclusion, a 'Thank You' needs to be expressed to our area legislators, many of whom have been very supportive of the CAP Project and have been a source of information/reference to those with questions or concerns. We also continue to request their continued support for the Phase II portion of the Project. Our bill authors deserve special recognition for their efforts. They were primarily responsible for the appropriation of Phase I funding and will be critical in securing the Phase II funds.

On behalf of our six-county partnership group, we would like to thank both Rep. Deb Kiel and Sen. LeRoy Stumpf for their work and the leadership put into this project. We also thank their staff members who have worked behind the scenes on our behalf. We thank you and urge your continued efforts on our behalf securing the final Phase II funding for the project. — **Jon Steiner, administrator Polk County Environmental Services**



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# Change made in reorganization of County Board

In a change from the normal reorganization done by the County Board, Commissioner Craig Bunes was chosen at the first meeting in January to serve as the chair for the first half of 2016. Commissioner Nick Nicholas is the vice chair for that same period.

The change is that in July, they will exchange positions with Nicholas becoming the chair and Bunes the vice chair. The chair and vice chair positions are normally chosen for the full year on a set rotation basis.

Further reorganization of county government will also occur in July when Commissioner Don Diedrich is to become chair of the Polk County Social Service Board succeeding Commissioner Bunes.

The Social Service Board meets monthly as a separate body. It is made up of the five county commissioners and at-large members Paula Waters, Crookston, and Cathy Gutterud, Fosston.

Without the emergence of some new and unexpected issues, much of the County Board's focus during the year will be on conducting regular business while completing the relocation of three county offices along with the final phase of remodeling at the Law Enforcement Center.

Both the County Attorney and Public Defender offices have already moved from the first floor to space on the second floor of the Justice Center. These moves, which now locate all court activities on the Second floor of the building, were made to create space on the ground floor of the building for Polk County Public Health.

Public Health is scheduled to move to those quarters in late April marking for the first time in many years that it has been housed in a county-owned building. The department has operated from leased space — at a cost of \$50,000 a year — at 721 So. Minnesota St. since October 2003. Before that, it had been



**County Attorney Office staff members, from left, Norma Johnson, Lindsey Goering, Jaime Fuchs, Pam Cournia and Debbie Berhow are now working from new quarters in the Polk County Justice Center. The**

**office recently moved from the ground floor level of the building to the second floor as a part of a relocation of offices that will create space for the Public Health Department to move into the building this summer.**

temporarily located in space in the old Central High School for a couple of years. And previous to that, it was in rented space on University Avenue after having been in the basement of the now removed Annex Building.

Constructed as the Sunnyrest Tuberculosis Sanitarium in the 1920s, the Annex Building, as it became known, had served as the home of the Glenmore Chemical Dependency Agency, as a minimum-security detention facility for the county, and as a storage facility before being taken out of service in early 2015. It was taken down in December.

At the Law Enforcement Center, the project currently in planning involves expansion of the server room and increasing the cooling capability of that room. The objective is to create needed additional space along with an environment that is needed for the most reli-

able operation of county's electronic information system. The possibility of future growth long-term is also a consideration.

Other work in the county is to include the creation of a satellite office for the Sheriff's Department in the county-owned Stenberg Building in Fosston.

Also on the table is the expansion of the waste to energy incinerator in Fosston. An attempt to secure the second phase of grant funding to pay for about one-half of the \$15 million project is being made in the Legislature.

The first half of the funding request was approved in the 2015 session. Tip fees collected from existing county partners in the incinerating operation along with income collected from the sale of recycled items that are removed from the waste stream are to cover the balance of the cost of the project.

## Satellite office

### Continued from Page 1

"Basically," Erdman says, "it will be housing the deputies who are assigned to do patrol and to conduct the investigations that are done in East Polk County.

"Having secure garage space will be such an advantage for our operations as it will eliminate the need for those resources to be relayed to the east end of our county; they will be available to us as a situation unfolds, making us better prepared and more efficient."

The contract deputies serving the City of

Fosston will continue to maintain an office in the Fosston City Hall but, for the most part, Erdman says, all of the rest of law enforcement will work primarily from the Stenberg Building, including, as needed, by the State Patrol and Department of Natural Resources.

The county used funds that had been accumulated over several years from the sale of recycled materials to purchase the property at reduced price of \$192,000 in the fall of 2011. The 17,800-square-foot building had housed the Stenberg Welding

& Fabricating business.

Located on property adjacent to the Polk County Waste to Energy Incinerator, the site was acquired to provide a permanent base for the county's recycling program, which had been operating from a leased building across the street from the incinerator.

With only a part of the building needed for the recycling program, some of the unused space is being made available for use by the sheriff's department.

## 2016 is an election year in county, too

As they say, it's been in all the papers... 2016 is an election year and with all the notoriety of the presidential race, three of the five Polk County commissioner seats are also up for election this fall.

**Commissioner District 1**, currently held by Craig Bunes, consists of the south part of Crookston, the City of Fertile and the townships of Fairfax, Kertonville, Tilden, Grove Park, Russia, Onstad, Godfrey, Woodside, Reis, Liberty, Garfield and Garden.

**Commissioner District 3**, currently held by Nick Nicholas, consists of the northern part of Crookston and the townships of Parnell, Crookston and Gentilly.

**Commissioner District 5**, currently held by Don Diedrich, consists of the townships of Higdem, Sandsville, Farley, Brislet, Helgeland, Esther, Northland, Tabor, Angus, Brandt, Grand Forks, Sullivan, Keystone, Euclid and Belgium, in addition to the northern part of East Grand Forks.

**(See commissioner district map on Page 12)**

Commissioner terms are for four years meaning with the Nov. 8 election, these three terms would start Jan. 1, 2017 and end Dec. 31, 2020.

Candidate filing opens Tuesday, May 17, and closes at 5 p.m. Tuesday, May 31. If more than three candidates file for any of the seats, a primary election would be conducted to narrow the field to the top two for the November election.

Candidates must be at least 18 years of age, a United States citizen and reside in the district for which they are running. Anyone interested in filing can contact Director of Property Records/Elections Michelle Cote at 218-470-8352 for more information. — **Chuck Whiting, Polk County administrator**

## Budget set, labor agreements settled, construction projects moving ahead....

By Chuck Whiting, Polk County Administrator



In December the County Board approved the 2016 budget, kicking off a busy winter that has seen quite a bit of progress in just the few months of the new year.

The overall budget increased to just over \$63 million which included \$3 million from a bond sale to address county building improvements and repairs.

The tax levy increased just under 3.5% to \$20,654,891, or about one third of the total county budget. As of this writing, five of the seven labor contracts had been settled with the other two tentatively settled. Each contained 3% wage increases for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Building improvements got underway even before the budget was approved since bond proceeds were secured in November. Most noticeable is the move of the County Attorneys offices to the second floor of the Justice Center. The Public Defenders offices also moved to the opposite end of the second floor, all to make way for the Public Health department to move into the first floor.

This should be completed by the end of April and will have a separate access for Public Health on the south side of the building. This

move saves the county lease payments it has been paying for the past decade.

Other bond-funded projects included the demolition of the old Annex building, HVAC upgrades in both the Justice Center and Government Center, and remodeling of the old recycling building in Fosston. This last space is being converted into office space for the Sheriff's Department which provides law enforcement for the City of Fosston, and is in addition to their office in Fosston City Hall.

The largest projects are yet to come with state bond funds coming for the expansion of the county incinerator facility in Fosston and a new transfer station building in Crookston. These projects will receive considerable funds from the State of Minnesota, with the difference funded by Polk County solid waste bonds. The bonded debt is paid with solid waste fees collected from Polk, Clearwater, Bemidji, Mahnomen and Norman counties, and do not hit the property levy. Hubbard County will begin its delivery soon as well. Expect to see these projects start later this year.

All in all a busy year and one that should settle down by this time next year.

## Law enforcement units adopt joint powers pact to guide working together

Area law enforcement units have always been there to assist each other but now there is a formal joint powers agreement to cover how they might work together.

The agreement involves the Polk County Sheriff's Department and the police departments in Crookston and East Grand Forks in Minnesota along with the Grand Forks County Sheriff's Department, the Grand Forks Police Department and the University of North Dakota Police Department in North Dakota.

Outlined are the conditions under how, through the establishment of a joint Grand Forks Regional Special Operations Group (SOG), the participating agencies can exchange or provide personnel and equipment for the purpose of conducting or assisting law enforcement and

emergency response efforts.

Conditions under which the agencies work together are to include threats to public health and safety including criminal activity and natural or manmade emergencies or disasters.

The agreement addresses how, since the individual parties do not individually have all of the resources needed to cope with every possible incident, crime, emergency or disaster by themselves, the creation of an SGO can provide operational readiness where police powers can be exercised and resources can be shared.

The SOG is to have six specialized teams including the Special Weapons & Tactics Team (SWAT), Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT), Bomb Team, Tactical Emergency Medical Services (TEMS) Team, Water Operations

Team, and the Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Team.

The participating agencies are to each have one voting member on an executive board that will administer the SOG. The Altru Health System, while not a formal member of the SOG body, may also be allowed to participate in the SOG activities and have a voting member on the executive board.

The 13 different fire departments throughout Polk County also have a mutual aid agreement outlining how they will share personnel and equipment as a way to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, the East Grand Forks and Grand Forks fire departments assist each other with firefighters and equipment as needed. East Grand Forks also works with Grand Forks Air Force Base on a similar arrangement.

# Appraisal system in plain language

## How it is done

On the next three pages, Polk County Director of Assessments Services (assessor) Robert Wagner outlines how properties are appraised to determine valuations in the process of determining property taxes.

The appraisal determination is the first step in determining the amount of tax that is assessed to each parcel as a way to fund the operations of local government units — counties, cities, townships, school districts, watershed districts, etc.

Introduced on Page 8 are the Assessment Services staff members — those who might come knocking on your door as a part of onsite visits that are made to view/inspect homes, businesses, farmsteads, and cropland and recreational lands in the appraisal process.

Additional information about the property tax subject is available on the [www.revenue.state.mn.us/propertytax/Pages/factsheets.aspx](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/propertytax/Pages/factsheets.aspx) website. Specific issues can be addressed with county assessment services staff by calling 218-281-4186.

The process of determining the valuation of building properties for tax purposes begins with the collection of the physical information about the property... the “facts.”

At this point the process amounts to just getting the facts; there is no opinion involved. These facts include the size of the building, the grade of the construction, the age, etc. That is where the appraisal process begins.

The facts are entered into the County’s CAMA system, the Computer-Aided Mass Appraisal system. Once all of the factual information is entered, this cost system that will generate a cost figure for construction of the building. This cost should be equal to the current replacement cost of construction. Age and depreciation factors then adjust that number to what it should be in today’s market.

The sales studies that we do provide for another adjustment in the final valu-

ations of properties for that particular taxing district.

## Land valuations

The process for determining the valuation of land is different.

The facts for land include the size of the tract, the soil type for agricultural land and its location. Location doesn’t have a cost factor that is built in. The location factor comes strictly from comparable sales.

By state statute, we need to re-visit to view and to re-appraise each property once every five years. This is the minimum standard. We actually, probably do this a little more often than that. The five-year timetable is the bare minimum.

What the State of Minnesota wants done by having a reappraisal of one-fifth of the properties each year is for there to be a physical “re-looking” at them... an on-site reviewing of the property. This amounts to knocking on the doors of homes. We also do the same with farmland. We drive out to the land and look at it to see if there are any changes.

For farmland use, we look at any records that we can see such as aerial views with the soil type parcel overlay. If we have access to Farm Service

Agency (FSA) records or if owners have provided us with FSA records, we will look at them, too.

The actual farmland valuation comes down to comparable sales. When we look at the comparable sales study, we look at the entire county. The sale value is compared to the value that we have on the parcel as the assessed value. This is what is called the sales ratio.

By state statute, the assessed value is to be at 100 percent of the market value. In reality, you can’t hit the 100 percent on everything, so the state allows a window of from 90 to 105 percent of sales ratio on the median sale in that range. The median is actually the middle sale. It is not the average. It is the middle sale. If there have been five sales, the median sale is the No. 3 sale... the one in the middle.

The median sale eliminates the outlying sales... the high ones and the real low ones so that you get a truer reading of what is actually going on in the market. If that median sale for the entire county falls outside of the 90 to 105 percent range, then we must get the valuation into that range. If the valuation based on the county median sale is too

high, we must lower the value. If we are too low, that means raising the valuations.

Typically, we don’t set valuations on a countywide basis but that is the start.

After looking at farmland on a countywide basis, we break Polk County down into East and West. There are two distinct markets for farmland across the county. We analyze each one of those areas the same way that we do the entire county to see how far off we fall from that 90 to 105 percent range.

When we determine if we need to adjust something in one of those two markets, we further break it down into East, West and Central Polk County, approximately in thirds. Re-look at the statistics again to see if there is any difference, are any more specific areas compared to the three areas that we should be concentrating on.

When we get it narrowed down to those three areas and if there is the need to do some adjustment, we start looking at the individual townships.

Is there a grouping of sales in one area? Are there one or two sales here and one or two sales there? We look at the general soils map at the same time. Is it the same general types of soil that are selling?

We don’t get too parcel specific at this time. We are not working on a Crop Equivalency Rating (CER) system or on Crop Production Index (CPI). CERs were a big thing a few years back. Now, the CPI is probably the basis that is most used if you are going to look at the individual soils. We’re mostly looking at it using the general soils map as we consider the sales and plot out where we need to increase or decrease valuations.

Even if a township doesn’t have any sales, we look at the area around it and determine what the real estate market is... has it gone up or has it gone down? An individual township can get an increase or a decrease in farmland values just based on that comparison.

We look at a lot of different things. We do all of our sales ratio studies in-house. The State of Minnesota, which also does ratio studies, is a little more sophisticated in how they do them. The state includes some time trend studies, etc., so that they come up slightly different than we do.

As an example, when looking at things

Continued next page

# Appraisal system in plain language

for the 2016 assessment, our ratios look really good. We don't have to change land values by that comparison but when we look at the state's ratio with the time trend added in, we're looking at roughly a 5 percent average decrease in ag values within the county.

Conversely, if values were going up, the time trend actually hits a little harder. We're a little more aggressive in raising the values because of the time trend that the state does in an upscale market, but on the way down — currently we are kind of in a leveling off to a down market period in ag land value — it accelerates a drop in value for tax purposes.

A review of ag land properties is done on every parcel every year. The actual physical viewing is once every five years. The calculations that are based upon the market are done on a yearly basis. That's the case with all real estate, whether it is commercial, residential, farmland or whatever. The physical viewing is only done every five years. The valuation of every parcel is reviewed every year.

## Sales

Only sales that are determined to be "good" arms-length transactions are used in the sales study. A willing buyer and a willing seller, both of whom are seeking to maximize their gain from the transfer amounts to an arms-length transaction.

The State of Minnesota has published a list of Guidelines for accepting "good" or rejecting "not good" sales. Sales between relatives are typically not a good sale in determining valuations. The closer the relative, the more "not good" that the sale is. When the sale is between close cousins, or uncles and such, it becomes more debatable one way or the other.

I would honestly say that in Polk County, most of our sales between relative are fairly representative of the general market. Nobody is getting a deal, nobody is getting taken. There are instances where at least part of a sale is a gift. Typically, we don't have many of those in Polk County.

Personal representative estate sales are typically not good sales. We find that most of them around here are auction sales. Auction sales are typically good sales but if it is a personal representative deed, more than likely it will be thrown out by the state. We do argue at times to keep some of these sales in. We call

some of them out at the local level, too. The state goes over every single sale that occurs. They can make changes and trump us.

Unusual financing terms are one of the things that might get a sale thrown out.

Less than 10 percent down on a contract for deed is not considered a good sale. Excessive personal property can be another thing that can get a sale thrown out. We had an ag sale come through in which we couldn't figure out why it was so terribly high.

After multiple calls to the people involved, we found out that the cost of fall-applied fertilizer had been included in the sale price but that was not stated on the certificate of real estate value.

That was an unusually high sale when it shouldn't have been. Once we got some figures from the buyer and seller on the cost of the fertilizer and subtracted that out, the sale fell into pretty much the normal range. We have to look for things like that in a sale.

Other not good sales may include bank sales, government sales, sales to avoid foreclosure, sales of partial interest, split parcel sales, sales with lease-back, or sales containing parcels in more than one county.

You can have two parcels of land in different areas of the county that have the same soil type but have different values. The factors involved then include location of the sales that have occurred in that area.

For example: Typically for the western part of the county, if you have land that is capable of producing sugarbeets, is close to the factory, and is on good roads, you might see a premium paid for that land versus something that is a little farther out.

If you are a bean farmer and you are close to the bean plant, you might pay more for that land. Those are the types of factors that come into play. You get that information from the sales. It is nothing that we have in a book or anything like that.

## Commercial properties

A bar-restaurant sale is typically one of those sales that is not a good sale. That's usually because there is blue sky involved with clientele and there usually is a lot of personal property that is included in the sale.

With every sale that occurs, we make an attempt to verify the sale, whether it is ag, commercial or residential. By ver-

ify, it means that appraisers will call the buyer or the seller; sometimes it is the attorney who did the sale. We ask questions about the sale to verify it, to determine that there wasn't something that didn't show up on the certificate of real estate value and that the property sold was only the real estate and did not include personal property.

A certificate of real estate value must be filed for any sale for more than \$1,000 that occurs in the state of Minnesota. If we don't have a certificate of real estate value at the time that the deed comes in, the deed cannot be filed. The certificate of real estate value is required for a deed to be filed.

The state has now gone 100 percent to Electronic Certificate of Real estate Value (ECRV) filing. Many times we will not have a paper copy of the ECRV when the deed is filed but an electronic copy will be on our computer system. Any sale that is over \$1,000 in value requires an ECRV. The ECRV is the basis for establishing value. The public can search ECRVs on the Minnesota Department of Revenue website.

## Residential properties

Residential properties also fall under the once every five years that we should be knocking on their doors. We make an attempt to get into the homes. That is not saying that we get into all of the homes. In this day and age, most everyone works during the day, so you don't catch a lot of people at home.

When we don't catch someone at home and we feel that there is a need to get an interior look at the property, we will leave a door hanger stating the date that we were there, the parcel address, and a short explanation of why we either want to talk with the property owner or get a visual inspection of the property.

While at the property, the appraiser will check and note the exterior measurements, style of the house, number of stories, decks, patios, and any other exterior detail of the property that might affect its value.

A property owner can deny entrance. A number of years ago, they could not but Gov. Jesse Ventura had the law changed so that now a property owner can deny interior access to a property.

However, the catch is that when interior access is denied and you disagree with the valuation, the board of appeal

**Continued next page**

# Appraisal system in plain language

cannot change that value until there has been an interior inspection.

If someone denies access, we have to use "typicals" for that style of a house.

If the appraiser drives down the street and sees a similar house and has been in that house, the appraiser will use typicals for that style of house. Typically, it might have a bathroom and a half, a half-finished basement... just the typical things that you see.

From the outside of the house, you can pretty much tell if it has a fireplace. You can tell what kind of heat it has... gas or oil. There are a lot of clues from the outside. In an area where houses are very similar, similar size, similar style, similar age, there is not a lot of difference in them.

If we have to assume what is in that house, though, we are likely to assume that it is a little bit better than typical because we just don't know.

The homeowner has recourse through the Boards of Appeal, the County Board and Tax Court. But if the property owner wants to exercise any of the methods of appeal, the appraiser must be given access to see the interior of the house.

If the valuation is appealed and the property owner has had a private appraiser see the interior of the house, that private appraiser can value the house based on the specifics. If we have never been into the interior, we are at a disadvantage. We don't know what is there. We are estimating and we are usually estimating on the high end of normal.

## Appraiser qualifications

I have a staff of six appraisers. Typically, they are assigned to work in specific districts within the county. We are in a staff-building mode right now, though, so we are having multiple appraisers working in multiple districts in order to get everything done for the year.

A couple of years back, Minnesota changed the law on the licensing of appraisers. Prior to the change, all taxing districts in the state had a set minimum level of licensure for an appraiser to appraise the property in that taxing district. Since the change in law, all appraisers must now obtain an Accredited Minnesota Assessor level of licensure within five years from date of hire in order to appraise any property within a taxing district.

What this has done is to force a lot of

appraisers to get up to that higher level of licensure. In Polk County, I have required all of my staff to get up to that higher level of licensure for a number of years... ever since I started in this office in December 1996. Township assessors, who work in some of the more rural townships in Polk County where there is little or no commercial property, are now also required to reach that level of licensure.

There are several different levels of appraiser licensure. The entry level is the Certified Minnesota Assessor licensure, (CMA), which requires a minimum of five weeks of classroom education in addition to having one full year of experience. This experience amounts to a training period within the office.

When the first level of licensure is achieved, this is about the first time that we send appraisers out on their own. The appraisal process requires an opinion. Previous to that, their only work has been with the collection of facts and details in the office.

The next level of licensure is the Certified Minnesota Appraiser who is "Income-Qualified" (CMA-IQ). This requires several weeks of classes in income valuation. This allows them to work with the more complex commercial apartment type properties where income becomes a part of the valuation.

The next step up is the Certified Minnesota Appraiser Specialist licensure, which adds a type of "form appraisal." This is similar to a fee appraisal in which an appraisal is done on a single property and a report is written. They are graded on the report, which is quite a detailed and all encompassing.

After that level is the Accredited Minnesota Assessor licensure, which requires three years of experience from the date of hire. It requires a number of the more advanced classes that get into the administration of assessment and include assessment law.

As you go up in license level, it naturally becomes more complex. These licensure levels are now the state's minimum requirement for what must be obtained in the first five years.

The one remaining license level — Senior Accredited Minnesota Assessor License — is the one that all county assessors or assessors for cities of the first class must have. This requires five years of experience and quite a bit more class in appraisal and specifics.

Some of the classes are starting to be available on the Internet. The majority

of the classes that we have to take are still either in St. Paul or in St. Cloud. These classes involve some very heavy concentration and require being away from the office for a week along with the cost of travel and housing.

The Association of Minnesota Assessors (MAAO) is working on having more classes be available online so that they are easier to complete and are more accessible. These classes are very important and are very hands-on, which makes them difficult to be offered online via the Internet.

## Appraisal purpose

The basis of determining property valuation is not to raise the revenue that local governments require. The valuation basis, coupled with the statutory classification percentages for the different types of properties, is used to determine what part of the tax dollar that is levied by each branch of government that will be assessed against your parcel... what is each parcel's fair share.

This is why it is important to have valuations be fair and equitable within your township, county, and school district.

The State Department of Revenue oversees the entire state in an effort to make valuations fair and equitable between the counties. We have a number of taxing districts — school districts being the largest ones — that cross county lines. That is one of the reasons for the state to monitor all counties... so that districts that cross county lines are appraised on an equitable basis. The whole idea is to be fair.

Some times when you look at the valuation determined for your property, you might think that the value is okay. My house, my property is worth that much. But when you get your tax statement, it becomes a different story.

Nobody likes to pay taxes. And certainly, nobody likes to pay more than their fair share.

But if the valuation on a property is correct and you run it through the state statute system for taxation, then you will be paying your fair share. Sometimes it is hard for people to separate the valuation from the amount of tax because the value is the basis, but the value only serves to determine what portion of that whole levy your property will pay. —

**Robert Wagner, Polk County Director of Assessment Services**

# The Appraisal Team

## Heather Bruley

I live in Crookston with my husband, Josh, and our 3 children, Keaton (14), Abigail (5) and Hadleigh (4). I was born in Crookston and grew up in the Gentilly area. My parents are Allan and the late Diane Trudeau. I graduated from Crookston High School and have a degree from Northland Community & Technical College in Ra-



diological Technology.

I am also licensed as a Property & Casualty Insurance Producer in Minnesota and North Dakota. I started working in the Assessor's Office January 2015. Since then, I have achieved my Certified Minnesota Assessors License and am currently working toward my Income Certification.

I am a member of the Minnesota Association of Assessing Officers (MAAO) and am the Taxpayer Service Center representative on the Polk County Safety Committee. I am also active in the PTO at my daughter's school. I look forward to continuing my education in this field, as well as working for the citizens of Polk County.

## Mark Landsverk

I grew up and still live in rural Fosston. I graduated from University of North Dakota in 1987 with a B.S degree in Geography & History. After college, I farmed with my brother near Fosston for nearly 20 years. While farming, I served on the Fosston Elevator Board.



I joined the Assessor's Office as appraiser in 2006, working mainly with rural properties and agricultural land. I achieved my Senior Accredited Minnesota Assessor license designation in 2013 and became Chief Deputy Assessor in 2014. I represent Region 8 on the Agricultural Committee of the MAOA. My wife, Jill, and I have three children named Christian, Olivia and Amelia.

## Amber Swenson-Hill

I'm originally from Crookston and have lived in this area for most of my life. It has been a great journey studying civil engineering at UND, finding my passion in real estate, meeting my now husband, Kyle Swenson, and recently celebrating the birth of our first baby girl.

Over the years I've been taught so much about the business from my family by working with them at The Real Estate Place in Crookston. Four years ago (August 2012), I came to work for the county and, as fate would have it, ended up in the Assessor's Office. It really is a job I enjoy.



Through joining MAOA, I'm moving toward my AMA license, and writing for Equal Eyes, MAOA's award-winning publication. I've learned so much. The field of assessment presents new challenges every day and I look forward to expanding my knowledge even further by learning from the staff.

## Wesly A. Oian

I have been in the real estate field since the mid 1980s and have been a property appraiser since 1987.

I started in the appraisal field in Maricopa County, Arizona. After 10 years there as an appraiser first in the Commercial Department, then in the Litigation Department, and then back in the Commercial Department in a supervisory position, we moved to Mankato, Minn.



After assisting in the volunteer Disaster Reassessment effort after the 1997 Red River Valley flood, I accepted a position with the Polk County Assessor's Office in August of 1998. I have had the privilege of assisting with two other unfortunate disaster reassessment events, the 1999 St. Peter Tornado and the 2002 Roseau flood.

I have received certificates of commendation and letters of gratitude from two governors, the commissioner of the Minnesota Dept. of Revenue, and from the president of MAOA. I am a 15-year member of MAOA and am experienced in all fields of property appraisal from land and residential to complex commercial/ industrial and income producing property.

My wife, Lori, and I have two daughters that are grown and have families of their own — Carolyn and Dave Jensen of Maple Grove, Minn., and Lacy and Joey Fayette of East Grand Forks. We have been blessed with three wonderful, healthy and ambitious grandsons, Oliver (6), Benjamin (4) and Carter (3).

## Sam Melbye

I was born and raised in Crookston. After graduating from high school, I went to the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh to pursue a degree in communications. From Oshkosh, I moved to Moorhead to begin my professional life. After a few years there, I moved back to Crookston and commuted to Thief River Falls for work at the Digi-Key Corporation.

I completed my B.S. in Communications at the University of Phoenix while working at Digi-Key. Around this time, I met my wife, Marley. We have made our home here in Crookston.



After completing my degree, I was hired by Polk County to work in the Taxpayer Service Center. I transitioned to the Assessor's Office side of the TPSC in June 2012 as a staff appraiser.

With Polk County, I have attained a Certified Minnesota Assessor license and am currently working on my next license level, which I hope to obtain this fall.

I have been active with the MAOA Information Systems Committee and am responsible for updating the job-posting website and notifying the membership of all job opportunities. I am also the information technology liaison for the Taxpayer Service Center and was fortunate to work with many talented people in redesigning the Polk County website.

## Kristine Moody

I was born and raised in East Grand Forks and graduated from Senior High School. I graduated from the University of North Dakota in May 2009 and worked in the medical field for four years before returning to school to earn a master of science degree in Business from the University of Mary in December 2015.



I started in the Polk County Assessor's Office in October 2015 and am currently working on my first step of licensure.

I consider myself a jack of random trades having studied opera at the Bel Canto Studio of voice for seven years, having been in multiple concert choirs through UND, North Dakota State University, and the Master Chorale. In my free time, I am

an amateur painter/artist/writer. I love travel and have been fortunate to have visited 10 different countries in Europe — France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Capri, Malta and Czech Republic. I am a recent amateur roofer and attic insulation technician (though still in training and not very proficient).

I was married to Richard Moody of Salem, Va., on April 12, 2012, at Sligo, Ireland. We have two dogs, two birds and one cat and reside in East Grand Forks.

## Robert L Wagner

I am a born and raised Polk County native. While growing up at Fisher, I had the good fortune of working with electrical, plumbing and carpenter tradesmen as well as working on the family farm.

I attended the University of North Dakota for two years on a math major/economics minor track. While at UND, I worked at the Red Pepper cooking, cleaning, serving and occasional managing when the owners were away.



I graduated from the University of Minnesota Duluth with a B.S. in Business Education. During my time at UMD, I worked in the Admissions Office under the Vice Provost of Student Affairs on an internship. I was trained on and operated the latest business technology at that time, the CPT (computer programmed typewriter).

After graduation from UMD, I continued to work on the family farm until 1983. Following that, I sold real estate in Minnesota and North Dakota. I signed on with Polk County as an appraiser in the Assessor's Office in January 1987 after taking an appraisal class from then Polk County Assessor Dale Halos.

Upon Dale's retirement, I became the Polk County assessor in December 1996. I hold the Income Qualified Senior Accredited Minnesota Assessor license from MAOA along with a Certified General Real Property Appraisal license through the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

My wife, Jane, and I live in East Grand Forks and are now 'empty nesters' after raising three sons of whom we are very proud, John, Thomas and Max.

## Remonumentation effort is complete

# Corner points now no more than 3 miles apart

The buying and selling of property in Polk County has become easier and more accurate as a result of the recent establishment of “corner points” that are now in place no more than three miles apart.

The creation of three-mile apart corner points marks the completion of a “remonumentation” effort that has been ongoing over the past 12 years.

The first phase of the work created accurate section corner points that were six miles apart. Completed under contract over five years (2004-2008), this work established corner points at the northeast corner of each township.

Work on the second phase of re-monumentation, which was begun in 2009 and established the three-mile-apart corner points, was completed late last year.

“Now, no matter where you are in the county,” County Engineer Richard Sanders notes, “a documented, certified section corner is within three miles.”

The Widseth Smith Nolting engineering firm, the county’s designated land surveyor, did the “three-mile apart” project on a contract basis over six years. The total \$498,000 cost of the project included some extra work that was encountered in the Fertile and East Grand

Forks areas.

The County Recorder's Compliance Fund has paid for the first four years of the project — \$480,000 — with the balance of the near half-million-dollar project also to be paid for from the fund. Polk County Director of Property Records Michele Cote, who serves as the county recorder, supervises the fund which accumulates by collecting \$11 from each \$46 recording fee.

The fund was originated to ensure that the recorder is compliant with the state statutes that require the recording and return of documents within a specified time period. For calendar year 2011 and thereafter, the maximum time allowed for completion of the recording process for documents that are presented in recordable form is 10 business days. When the recorder is not compliant with the statute the Compliance Fund is utilized to ensure compliance.

“As a part of planning and zoning requirements, when a licensed surveyor does a survey on a parcel of property,” Sanders notes, “the survey is developed from the two nearest existing section corner points. In the surveying process, an additional corner is usually established

and recorded, so as private surveyors do work, or as we have WSN do remonumentation for our county roadwork, more corners will get certified.

“By state statute, remonumentation is required whenever construction work is done on county roads. This information is blended into one county map showing all of the corners. The map is available for all who might need it,” Sanders says.

The three-mile corner posts provide a benefit to anyone in the county who is purchasing or selling property... so that they know exactly what they are purchasing or selling. The three-mile corner post information will help to settle boundary discrepancies and disputes.

The remonumentation also helps the Polk County GIS Department (geographic information system) know the exact location of property lines in relation to overlays of other information. “This tightens up our GIS map,” Sanders says, “by making it more accurate in where the parcel boundaries really are in relation to where they might be thought to be on the ground. And it makes it easier for our Highway Department to document the property owners when we might have to purchase right-of-way.”

## Buffer zone legislation effects still in development

Assigned state agencies — the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Board of Water & Soil Resource (BSWR) — continue to interpret, develop and format their respective obligatory duties as outlined by Minnesota statute (often referred to as buffer legislation) as passed by State Legislature in May 2015 and communicate progress to local soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs).

Though various questions/ scenarios remain to be addressed and recent news coverage exhibited Gov. Dayton’s clarifying direction to the DNR regarding exclusion of non-public drainage systems on preliminary buffer maps, there have been no amendments to Minnesota statute.

DNR maps that indicate public (protected) waters with current shoreland classifications and public drainage systems are anticipated to be available for

local review in spring 2016 and finalized versions released by July 2016. Required buffers on public waters (50 feet) must be in place by Nov. 1, 2017; buffers on public drainage systems (16.5 feet) must be in place by Nov. 1, 2018.

If a landowner is out of compliance with the requirement, the county or watershed district will provide a correction letter (notification provided to BWSR with potential assessment of fines) and work with the landowner on a reasonable timetable for completion. SWCDs are not assigned any authority or role regarding enforcement of Gov. Dayton’s Buffer Initiative. Local water resources riparian protection requirements will be developed by July 1, 2017 and will not be included on DNR maps.

West Polk SWCD staff are available to assist with any inquires relative to buffer legisla-

tion and identify multiple funding options with direction. Federal agencies — the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) — administer multiple compliance programs that provide cost share and potential annual payments through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for implementation and maintenance of buffer/filter strips, although availability of programs may terminate after buffer establishment deadlines.

It is our certain intention to assist you with technical guidance and field inquiries as information becomes available. A self-initiative approach to compliance (without any state or federal program assistance or compensation) allows a landowner to determine the seed mix of peren-

nial vegetation for establishment of buffer obligation. Utilizing this approach ensures that landowners maintain the ability to use established buffer areas for haying, grazing, hunting or other activities, providing that the buffer vegetation is maintained. Landowners may restrict public access, including the right to post their property to prevent hunting or other trespassing.

Please view [www.westpolkswcd.com](http://www.westpolkswcd.com) buffers page and utilize direct links to BWSR, DNR and Minnesota Farm Bureau web pages for current available information regarding buffers or visit our field office (co-located with NRCS) at 528 Strander Ave. in Crookston. — **Aaron Habermehl, district technician Wetland Conservation Act administrator LGU, West Polk Soil & Water Conservation District**

*Supervisory role is expanded*

## Holte given new duties

In his new position as the assistant administrator of the Polk County Environmental Services Department, Josh Holte has taken on additional supervisory duties that allow Jon Steiner, the administrator, to focus more extensively on the ongoing project that is to expand and further develop the disposal solid waste in north-western Minnesota counties.

Polk County has applied for state bond funding for a \$15 million regional solid waste expansion project that involves the counties of Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Mahnomen, Norman and Polk. The project would leverage \$12.5 million in local funding to be matched by \$17.5 million in state bond funds issued via a grant.

The project includes new transfer stations in Bemidji (Beltrami County), Park Rapids (Hubbard County) and Crookston (Polk County). Other major portions of the project include the construction of a new compost facility at the Landfill Complex near

Gentilly, the expansion of the tip floor and addition of new processing equipment at the Resource Recovery Facility (incinerator) in Fosston, and additional equipment and modifications related to those facilities.

“Josh has demonstrated that he is willing and able to take on additional responsibilities and wants to advance his career,” Steiner states. “He’s smart, personable, utilizes good judgement and can remain calm and focused even in difficult situations. These are essential traits for the position, and finding and retaining people who have those traits is difficult. We are very fortunate to have Josh.”

After first joining Polk County in the summer of 2008 as an environmental field technician, Holte left in March 2011 to become the zoning, solid waste and emergency management administrator for Norman County. He returned to Polk County in 2013 as the county’s planning and zoning administrator.



**Joshe Holte**

A native of Grygla where he graduated from high school in 2004, Holte earned a B.S. degree in geography (regional planning and land use) with a minor in environmental studies at Bemidji State University in 2008. During his time in college, he did internships with the Beltrami County Highway Department and Cass County Environmental Services.

Holte and his wife, Amanda, a stay-at-home mom, live in Crookston. They have three young children, a son, Levi, and daughters, Natalie and Ellie.

## *Don't forget the building permit*

Polk County Environmental Services reminds property owners that building/land use permits are required for all construction projects in the county. If you are planning building/land use projects, please contact Polk County Planning & Zoning prior to construction to determine setback and ordinance requirements that may apply.

People sometimes forget to apply for a building permit or don't think they need a permit for a deck, small shed, etc. However, permits are required for almost any construction project. Any land alterations or landscaping activity in the shoreland or floodplain zoning districts may also require a permit.

More information on building/land use regulations can be found on the Polk County Website at [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) under the Environmental Services and Planning & Zoning Department page.

Land use/zoning permits that aren't obtained prior to construction are treated as “after the fact” permits subject to three times the cost of the permit plus an additional \$150 penalty fee. The costs can add up quick especially if setbacks aren't met or a variance or conditional use permit is required. In certain situations penalty fees may be over \$1,000.

So, make sure to apply for your land use/building permits early and plan ahead to avoid unnecessary delays or penalty fees. Our office is more than happy to answer questions and assist you through the permitting process. For more information contact Polk County Planning & Zoning at (218) 281-5700. — **Josh Holte, Polk County assistant Environmental Services administrator**

## Loans to upgrade septic systems available for low-income families

For the last three years, Polk County Environmental Services has been offering septic loan funding to low-income families within the county to upgrade failing septic systems. Money has been made available through the Clean Water Legacy Act and distributed to counties across the state.

Polk County has set up a revolving loan fund with a 25% cost-share grant available to property owners who have failing septic systems. By operating this program as a loan, we ensure that even if funding from the state runs out, we will be able to continue to help upgrade failing systems long into the future.

Since the program was launched in 2013, we have upgraded 13 septic systems in

the county. Last year, the county decided to put a little more incentive into the program by offering a 25% cost-share grant.

This means that the county will contribute 25% of the septic system replacement cost with the remaining 75% rolled into a .0001% loan that is paid back over a 10-year term as a special assessment. This makes it a very affordable and convenient program for many property owners.

Currently, the program has enough funding flowing back through special assessments to fund two to three additional systems per year.

Funding is subject to low-income guidelines and is based on household size. The county

has allocated funding again for the upcoming year and applications will be accepted through June 1st and awarded based on income status, condition of existing system, and proximity to priority surface waters.

After the June 1st deadline, the program will continue on a first-come first-serve basis for the remainder of 2016.

More information regarding this great program can be found on the Polk County Website at [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) under the Environmental Services and Planning & Zoning Department page or by calling Polk County Planning & Zoning at (218) 281-5700. — **Josh Holte, Polk County assistant Environmental Services administrator**



**Nancy Shafer**

## Shafer in state Communications Board position

Nancy Shafer, director of the Polk County Dispatch Center, is serving as an alternate member as a representative from the northwest region of Minnesota on the Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB) this year. She will become a full board member in 2017.

Shafer was appointed to serve in the alternate and full board member positions as a part of the March meeting of Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Board (NRECB). Membership on the SECB rotates annually through the six regional communications districts in Minnesota.

The NRECB district includes 14 counties (Becker, Beltrami, Clay, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Mahanomen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau), the city of Moorhead and the White Earth Tribe.

The other Greater Minnesota communications districts that are involved in the rotation process are those from the Central, South Central, Southeast, Southwest and Northeast regions. Becker County Commissioner John Okeson is chair of the NRCEB with Hubbard County Commissioner Cal Johannsen as vice chair. Commissioner Craig Bunn represents Polk County.

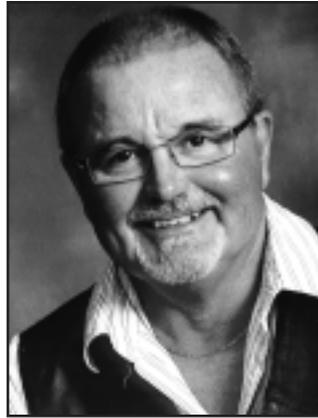
# Sorenson joins Red Lake Watershed

Terry Sorenson, Mentor, is the new East Polk County representative on the Board of Managers of the Red Lake Watershed District.

Appointed by the County Board in January to a three-year term, Sorenson succeeds Albert Mandt, who died last fall.

"I'm finding that serving on the board of managers is very interesting," Sorenson says. "I worked with watersheds on their projects when I was with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn-DOT), so I have some background in what they do but there is still a lot to learn. I'm really amazed at everything that watersheds do and at the expanse of the Red Lake Watershed District. It's a big watershed."

A native of Gonvick, Sorenson graduated from high school



**Terry Sorenson**

there in 1969. After several years in retail sales, he started a 34-year career with Mn-DOT at Ada in 1974. While living there, he served on the Ada City Council (1986-1994) and on the community's hospital board, public utilities commission and street

department, and also was on the board of Grace Lutheran Church.

Promoted to the position of operations supervisor for Mn-DOT at Crookston in 1990, he served in that job until retiring in 2007.

Sorenson and his wife, Faye (Mattson), who were married at Gully in 1970, have lived in Mentor for the past 18 years. They have two children, Shelly and Tory, four grandchildren and a great-grandchild. Sorenson is a trustee of Faith Lutheran Church in Mentor.

The West Polk County representative on the board of managers is Gene Tiedemann, Euclid. Tiedemann is vice chair of the board. Dale Nelson, Thief River Falls, the Pennington County representative, serves as the chair.

## Webster takes new information role

In the newly created position of systems administrator, Levi Webster has assumed supervisory responsibility in Polk County's Information Systems Department over systems side support staff, end user work orders and support requests.

Prior to his work for Polk County, Webster, who joined the I.S. Department on Jan. 4, had been the systems administrator at the University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC) where during the past four years he had monitored 1,300 laptops, desktop PCs and servers.

His work experience also includes almost six years as a support specialist at RDO Equipment Co. in Fargo.

As systems administrator, Webster has technical responsibility over storage, databases, data backups and archiving, email, Intranet and county websites, servers and all desktop and mobile end user equipment.

The new position was created by Polk County Information Systems Director Sebastian Sullivan as part of the restructuring of the original Information Technology Department created in early 2000.

"We needed to keep pace with rapidly evolving technology, Polk



**Levi Webster**

County's diverse and increasing number of systems as well as the complexity of support challenges," Sullivan notes. "The frequency and depth of the advanced work our department has been asked to deal with, compared to three or four years ago, required a split of the original administrator role into two separate positions with clearly defined skills and responsibilities.

"This splitting up of technical roles will effectively enable both administrators to keep with the increasing demands placed upon their time, mental focus and maintain the quality of work and pace expected by the county departments that we serve. The techni-

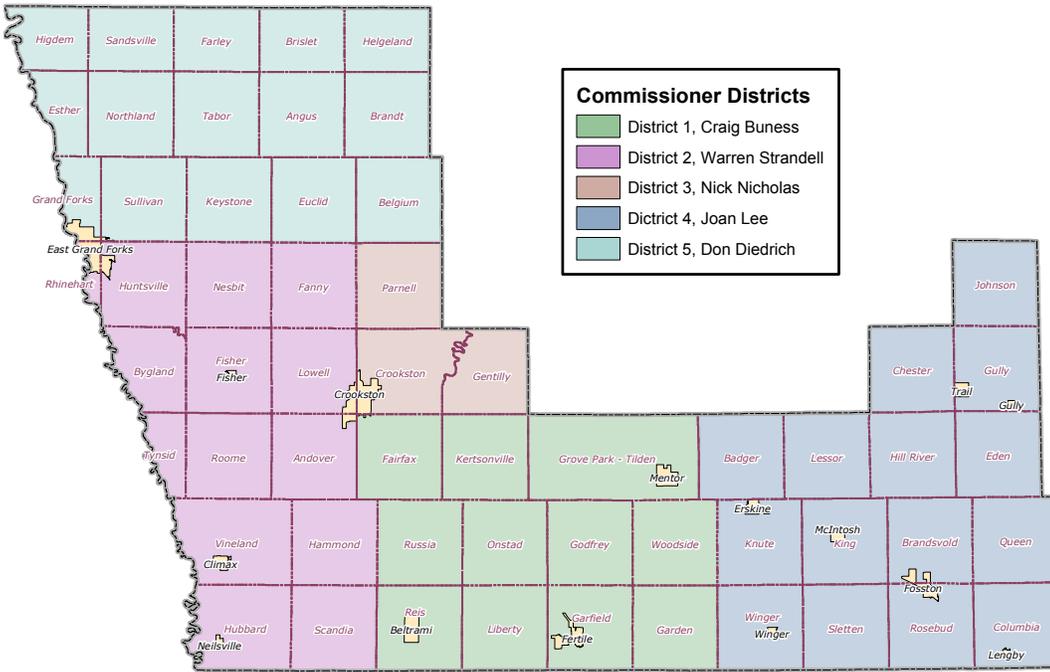
cal demands were just too much for any one person to handle on a sustained basis."

The other half of information systems department administration is that of "network" administrator. That position is currently open. A recruiting effort is currently underway to find the right person to assume that role.

"The network administrator," Sullivan says, "is responsible for implementing, maintaining and supporting connectivity between County and outside systems. The information systems side that Webster now supervises is responsible for servers, PCs, Laptops, mobile devices, telephones, email, Intranet, databases, storage, data backups and archiving.

With the new position, there is a split between support for the actual systems themselves and the network connecting them together and to outside organizations."

A native of the Kennedy area, Webster graduated from Kittson Central High School in Hallock in 2004 and from UMC with a B.S. degree in information technology management in 2008. He and his wife, Stephanie and their six-month-old son, Jackson, live in Crookston.



2016 Polk County Commissioner Districts

These data are provided on an "as-is" basis, without warranty of any type, expressed or implied, including but not limited to any warranty as to their performance, merchantability, or fitness for any particular purpose.

## Load limits preserve the roads

The load limits that went into effect on March 8 in Polk County — along with the rest of the North Central Region of Minnesota — will go off in eight weeks or sooner, if the Minnesota Department of Transportation determines that factors such as temperature, frost in the ground, water in the roads, etc. won't be detrimental.

"During spring load restrictions water is trapped between the frost and the roadway making it the weakest that it can possibly be," according to Polk County Engineer Richard Sanders.

"Load limit restrictions are put in place to prevent damage from happening in the different regions of the state... the Southeast, Metro, Central, North Central and North. We're in the North Central Region."

Each spring, two Highway

Department crews are assigned to erect the load restriction signs on the 1,000 miles of county roads. No signs are erected on roads that have a 10-ton rating. Roads rated for 7-ton or 9-ton capacities are signed appropriately. Gravel roads are statutorily posted for 5-ton limits, so they don't need signage.

The University of Minnesota Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) offers truck weight training every year to help individuals determine legal loads for their particular truck. This training will be held at the Polk County Human Service Center in East Grand Forks on March 30.

For more information, go to <http://www.mnltap.umn.edu/training/topic/customized/truck-weight/index.html>. The road restrictions map is on the county website: [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us).

## County Board Meeting Times

8:00 a.m. on 1st Tuesday of the month  
 10:00 a.m. on the 3rd Tuesday  
 8:00 a.m. on the 4th Tuesday  
**All meetings are open to the public**

### County Commissioners

Dist. 1 — Craig Bunes, chair  
 Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell  
 Dist. 3 — Nick Nicholas, v. chair  
 Dist. 4 — Joan K. Lee  
 Dist. 5 — Don Diedrich

## Polk County Planning Commission

Chair: Mike Powers, East Grand Forks (representing East Grand Forks mayor)

Vice Chair: Robert Franks, rural Warren (representing Commissioner Dist. 5)

Donovan Wright, rural Mentor (representing Commissioner Dist. 1)

Len Vonasek, rural East Grand Forks (representing Commissioner Dist. 2)

Courtney Pulkrabek, Crookston (representing Commissioner Dist. 3)

Paul Jore, rural McIntosh (representing Commissioner Dist. 4)

Wayne Melbye, Crookston (representing Crookston mayor)

Arlet Phillips, rural East Grand Forks (representing Polk County townships)

Dennis Yell, rural Mentor (representing Maple Lake Improvement District)

Rolland Gagner, rural Erskine (representing Union Lake Sarah Improvement District)

### Board of Adjustment

Chair: Mike Powers  
 Vice Chair: Robert Franks  
 Rolland Gagner  
 Donovan Wright  
 Courtney Pulkrabek  
 Alternate: Arlet Phillips  
 Alternate: Paul Jore

# Nielsville Bridge funds sought, road projects set

Spring seems to have taken over winter in northwestern Minnesota, which allows us all to start dreaming about summer. The Polk County Highway Department will have another busy construction season this year.

We are hoping that North Dakota will find the funding needed for their half of the Nielsville Bridge, so we can get it designed and start construction later this fall.

Other projects that we plan on constructing include:

- Grade-widening of **CSAH 34** from CSAH 36 to the south limits of Erskine. This job has taken a while to get to the construction phase because of environmental permitting and the right of way concerns. If those issues are taken care of in the next week or two, construction could begin in mid-June and be completed by mid-October.

We will be overlaying the following roads with bituminous this summer with completion by mid-September:

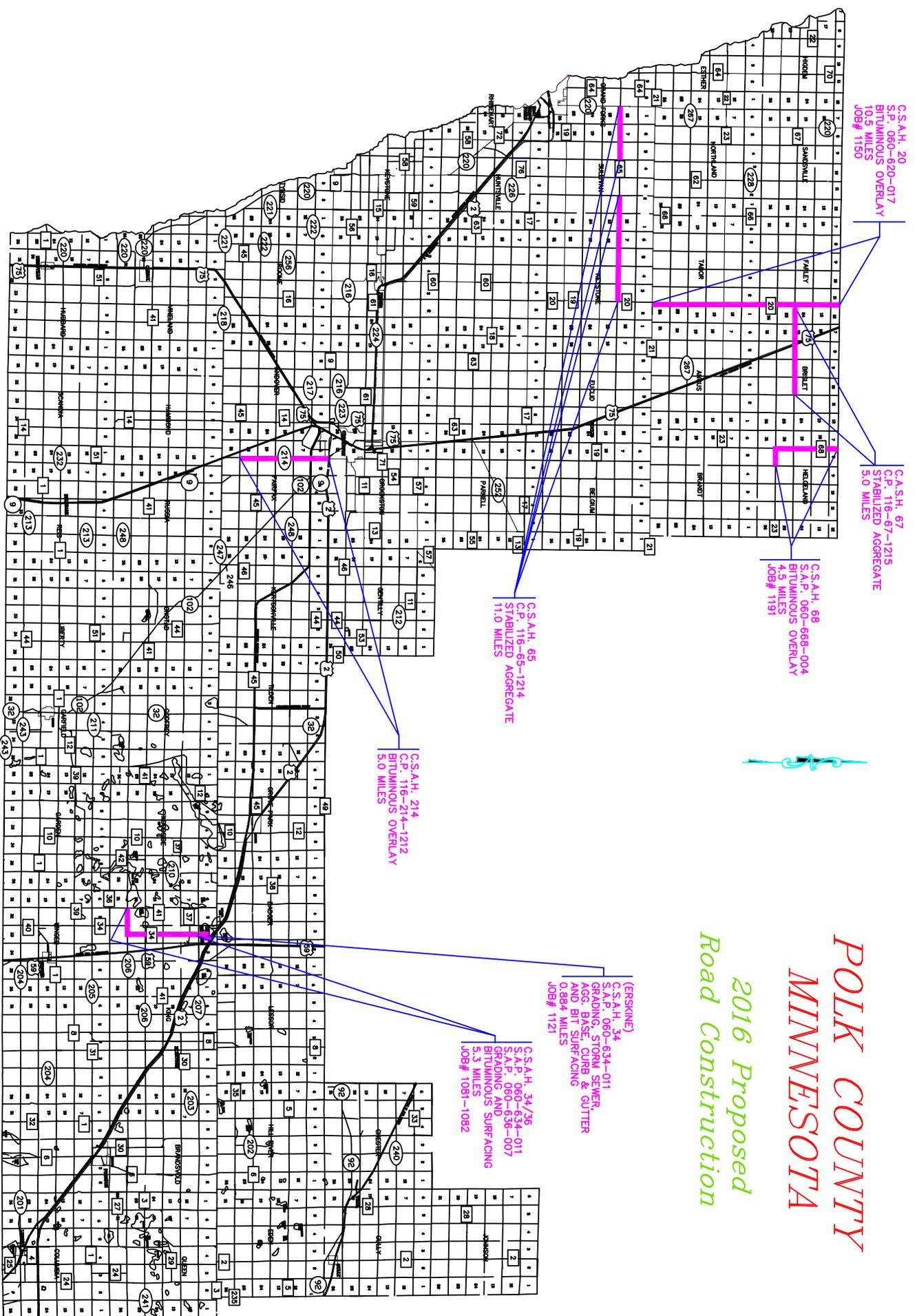
- **CSAH 20** from CSAH 21 to the Polk/Marshall County line.
- **CSAH 68** from CSAH 23 to the Polk/Marshall County line.
- **CR 214** from CSAH 45 to TH 2 in Crookston.

During the last 4 years, we have been stabilizing our gravel roads with a chemical called BASE1. This year we will be stabilizing another 17 miles of those roadways. This will be done on **CSAH 65**, **CSAH 67** and **CR 212**.

In addition to the contracted projects, the county maintenance crew will be performing the usual maintenance duties associated with upkeep of the county road system. — **Richard Sanders, Polk County engineer**

# POLK COUNTY MINNESOTA

## 2016 Proposed Road Construction



C.S.A.H. 20  
S.P. 060-620-017  
BITUMINOUS OVERLAY  
10.5 MILES  
JOB# 1150

C.S.A.H. 67  
C.P. 116-67-1215  
STABILIZED AGGREGATE  
5.0 MILES

C.S.A.H. 68  
S.A.P. 060-668-004  
BITUMINOUS OVERLAY  
4.5 MILES  
JOB# 1191

C.S.A.H. 65  
C.P. 116-65-1214  
STABILIZED AGGREGATE  
11.0 MILES

C.S.A.H. 214  
C.P. 116-214-1212  
BITUMINOUS OVERLAY  
5.0 MILES

(ERSKINE)  
C.S.A.H. 34  
S.A.P. 060-634-011  
GRADING, STORM SEWER  
AGG. BASE, CURB & GUTTER  
AND BIT SURFACING  
0.884 MILES  
JOB# 1121

C.S.A.H. 34/36  
S.A.P. 060-634-011  
S.A.P. 060-636-007  
GRADING AND  
BITUMINOUS SURFACING  
5.3 MILES  
JOB# 1081-1082

# Polk County Employee Anniversaries in 2016

<u>Hire</u>	<u>Employee</u>	<u>Department-Position</u>
<b>40 Years</b>		
3/10/76	Robert Bjerk	Highway Dept. - Engineering Tech III C
12/27/76	Laureen Anderson	Veterans Service - Admin. Asst. II
<b>35 Years</b>		
8/17/81	Valerie Bjerk	Administrators's Office - Admin. Ass't. II
<b>25 Years</b>		
3/01/91	Richard Sanders	Highway Dept. - County Engineer
4/19/91	Michelle Erdmann	Environmental Svcs. - Sec. Bookkeeper
7/29/91	Bruce Lindgren	Highway Dept. - Mech. Inventory Spec.
<b>20 Years</b>		
1/08/96	Jon Volker	Highway Dept. - Engineering Tech IIIB
4/01/96	Todd Rue	Incinerator - Ass't. Facility Manager
4/03/96	Rosa Guterrez	Social Services - Eligibility Worker
6/10/96	Marna Kelly	Social Services - Soc. Worker Child Prot.
8/26/96	Steven Nelson	Facilities Management - Custodian
9/09/96	JoAnne Martin	Incinerator - Sort Line Operator
9/23/96	Stephanie Olson	Public Health - Dietician
10/12/96	Rick Kappedal	Incinerator - Baler Forklift Operator
11/26/96	Bruce Hanson	Incinerator - Waste Combustion Opr.
<b>15 Years</b>		
1/22/01	Phillip Juve	Sheriff's Dept. - Sergeant
3/12/01	Anita Klinge	Taxpayer Service Ctr. - Admin. Ass't. I
4/18/01	Susan Gorder	Social Services - Social Worker
5/21/01	Jody Beauchane	Highway Dept. - Ditch Engineer/Ag Inspector/Emergency Manager
9/03/01	Holly Duciaume	Sheriff's Dept. - Dispatcher
508/01	Kathryn Plante-Ziermeier	Social Services - Social Worker
<b>10 Years</b>		
3/01/06	Cheryl Pitts	Social Services - Eligibility Worker
5/08/06	Darren Paulson	Incinerator - Maintenance Supervisor
5/22/06	Lynette Boese	Public Health - Registered Nurse II
7/05/06	Amy Solie	Social Services - Case Aide
8/21/06	Nicole Venem	Social Services - Lead Eligibility Worker
10/02/06	Jay Wallace	Highway Dept. - Maintenance/Signman
10/02/06	Mark Landsverk	Assessor Off. - Appraiser Tax Officer
10/02/06	Richard Kuzel	Highway Dept. - Maintenance
10/24/06	Howard Nettum	Highway Dept. - Maintenance
11/03/06	Kirsten Fagerlund	Public Health - Registered Nurse III
12/01/06	Tamara Conn	Public Health - Dietician
12/11/06	Sarah Keller-Reese	Public Health - Public Health Director
<b>5 Years</b>		
1/01/11	David Volker	Highway Dept. - Mechanic
4/18/11	Sam Melbye	Assessor Off. - Appraiser Tax Officer III
6/22/11	Joel Kortan	Incinerator - Yard Operator
7/01/11	Nathan Smith	Highway Dept. - GIS Specialist
8/01/11	David Davidson	Highway Dept. - Physical Plant Tech.
12/01/11	Elaine King	Finance Dept. - Clerk Typist Cashier IV
12/12/11	Kayla Schumacher	Taxpayer Svc. Ctr. - Clerk Typist Cash. III

## 2015 was record-setting year for jail population

Tri-County Community Corrections (TCCC) established a new high water mark for inmate population at the Northwest Regional Corrections Center in 2015 with an average daily population of 176 inmates.

November saw the highest population with an average daily population of 187 inmates, which is 93% of the facility's licensed operational capacity of 200 as established by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. The record setting numbers were driven by higher than anticipated by the housing of prisoners from other jurisdictions. Approximately 43% of the inmates housed at the Northwest Regional Corrections Center in 2015 were being housed for other jurisdictions for a per diem. This per diem income helps to generate revenue and offset operating expenses.

### Added operational challenges

The increased numbers do not come without significant operational challenges and add significantly to the stress being experienced by staff and to the inmate population, too. In a review of violation trends and officer reports, a direct correlation is seen between the increase in inmate population and the increase in officer calls for assistance, inmate violence and disciplinary violations in general.

The most glaring example is the increase in calls for assistance, which can range in severity from an inmate refusing to lock-down to an inmate assault in progress. From 2011 to 2013, when the average population was 128.6, the facility averaged 28.6 calls for assistance over the course of the year. From 2014 to 2015, during which time the average population ballooned to 172 inmates per day, the facility averaged 65 calls for assistance per year.

### Big increase

This was a 127% increase. Identifying ways to mitigate the increased stress and inmate violations has moved up the priority list of the jail's administrative and supervisory staff.

Federal Prison Rape Elimination Act Inspection

In November 2015, TCCC contracted with an auditor at the Department of Justice for purposes

of evaluating the jail's compliance with federal Prison Rape Elimination Act standards. President George W. Bush signed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) into law in 2003. The Prison Rape Elimination Act prohibits and seeks to eliminate sexual assaults and sexual misconduct in correctional institutions and community corrections settings. This audit report found that the Northwest Regional Corrections Center was in compliance with the PREA standards. A copy of the audit can be obtained by contacting TCCC.

### Probation Update

In addition to the increased workload seen in the jail, the Probation Department, which provides supervision of adults and juveniles within Norman, Polk and Red Lake Counties, has also seen an increase in workload.

While the total cases under supervision have decreased slightly in recent years, the complexity of cases being seen has increased disproportionately. The prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse amongst the population being served, along with a lack of resources available for many offenders, creates many challenges for the probation agents as they attempt to help offenders address risk factors that contributed to the offender's contact with the criminal justice system.

The lack of resources — both within and outside the organization — to address criminogenic risk factors has resulted in a steady increase in violations being filed with the court. A work group consisting of judges, county attorneys, public defenders, law enforcement officers and agency representatives has begun meeting to evaluate current violation practices.

As movement toward specialty courts and specialized caseloads for probation supervision is gaining traction across the country. The Probation Department has long implemented these practices and has agents specializing in the supervision of DUI offenders, working in the Intensive Supervision Program, and those who are working with mental health cases and with sex offenders. — **Andrew Larson, TCCC executive director**

## Family planning grant will increase access to testing

Prior to the formation of the Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Community Health Board (PNM CHB) in 2013, Polk County Public Health programs in the previous 20 plus years had been strengthened by the Minnesota Department of Health's Family Planning Special Projects (FPSP) grant program.

PNM CHB continues as a FPSP grantee and the organization has made great strides and achieved goals which align with the national Healthy People 2020 family planning goals. PCPH and NMPH have had multiple public and private partnerships that have led to transformational changes in promoting and improving the health of residents.

In July 2015, after two years of strategic planning, Polk County Public Health hired a nurse practitioner, who is passionate about public health's clinical and community services and serves as the medical provider at public health clinic locations (and monthly in one university) across the three counties.

HIV and Hepatitis C are lifelong, chronic illnesses without a cure. Left undiagnosed and untreated, these illnesses lead to higher healthcare costs and mortality. This causes significant concern considering that in 2014, 14% of new HIV diagnoses were in greater Minnesota.

## How to implement a supported workplace wellness program

If your organization is like most, unhealthy employees outnumber the healthy ones, costing you in productivity and profits.

You can attend the Polk Norman Mahnomen Community Health Services Workplace Wellness Collaborative to learn how to implement a comprehensive and supported workplace wellness program.

This workshop is designed for anyone wanting to start or

## How public health services are provided

The Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Community Health Board (PNM CHB) comprised of Polk County Public Health (PCPH) and Norman-Mahnomen Public Health (NMPH) is a multi-county community health services (CHS) entity responsible by Minnesota Statute 145A for protecting and promoting the health of Polk, Norman and Mahnomen county residents.

Additionally, statistics prove that low income persons at risk for STI's are at a higher risk for HIV and Hepatitis C.

The Community Health Board was recently awarded a Community Clinic Grant. Locally, the screening program will increase access to free HIV and Hepatitis C testing and identify early cases, which will reduce the spread of disease, extend life expectancy, and reduce costs of care — all aligned with several Healthy People 2020 Goals.

For more information, contact Melissa Hayes, FNP-C at 218-521-7773. — **Sarah Reese, Polk County Public Health director**

enhance an already existing workplace wellness program with policy, systems and environmental components.

This interactive training will teach you how to design and implement a successful and sustainable wellness program for your workplace using the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota's Healthy Worksites Tool.

For more information, contact Bethany Brandvold at 218-521-7771.



**Sand Hill Watershed District Administrator Dan Wilkens (left) was presented the 2015 Outstanding Watershed District Employee of the Year award by Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources Executive Director John Jaschke as a part of the annual Minnesota Association of Watershed District convention held in December.**

## Wilkens is named BWSR Watershed Employee of year

Sand Hill River Watershed District Administrator Dan Wilkens was named the 2015 Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Outstanding Watershed District Employee of the Year as part of the annual Minnesota Association of Watershed District convention held in December.

A leader in Red River Basin flood control and statewide drainage issues, Wilkens was instrumental in the creation of the Sand Hill River Watershed District in 1975 and served as a manager until 1999 when he became the district's administrator.

Wilkens has served on a number of task forces and committees, including the Red River Water Management Board, the Red River Basin Commission, the Flood Damage Reduction Work Group, the International Red River Board, and the statewide stakeholder Drainage Work Group, of which

he's been a member since it started in 2006. He has led efforts within the watershed district to support a major project to help stabilize and improve the Sand Hill River.

An advocate for better flood control, agricultural drainage, and water quality improvements, Wilkens' outreach efforts extend to the Sand Hill River Watch program that involves school students in water quality monitoring and water management education.

The district covers a 475-square-mile drainage area most of which is located in southern Polk County. Smaller areas are located in Norman and Mahnomen counties.

Wilkens, who grew up in the Fertile area, graduated from the Northwest School of Agriculture in Crookston before earning a B.S. degree in agricultural engineering and economics from the University of Minnesota.

## Christian reappointed to Sand Hill WD

Stuart Christian, rural Erskine, was reappointed in September to a new three-year term on the board of managers of the Sand Hill Watershed District.

Christian, who was first appointed to the board of managers in 1999, serves as the district's chair.

Other members of the district's board of managers are: Scott Balstad, rural Fosston, (vice chair); Bill Brekke, Nielsville, (secretary); Roger Hanson, Beltrami, and Phillip Swenson, Fertile.

## Polk County AIS Taskforce beginning second season...



Polk County formed an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Taskforce to help in the fight against aquatic invasive species within the County. The taskforce consists of members from all around the County and represents several different entities.

The taskforce spent 2015 working on several projects focusing on education and public awareness. Billboards, public access signs, and a few promotional items have been developed to help spread the message about the threat that AIS poses in Polk County and around the state. This year the taskforce is hoping to accomplish several more projects to help in the fight against AIS.

The taskforce is looking to hire a seasonal AIS employee to help conduct watercraft inspections, monitoring projects and other AIS outreach and educational activities.

Invasive species are species that are not native to Minnesota and cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Minnesota waters are threatened by aquatic invasive species. It is illegal to transport any aquatic species like Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, spiny waterflea or other prohibited invasive species. Within Polk County, Eurasian watermilfoil is already present on Union Lake, and zebra mussels have recently been discovered in the Red River.

With the spring fishing and boating season right around the corner it is critical that every boater take the steps necessary to limit the spread of AIS. So remember to clean, drain, and dry your boat every time to help protect our lakes and rivers. For more information visit [www.co.polk.mn.us/ais](http://www.co.polk.mn.us/ais). — Josh Holte, Polk County Assistant Environmental Services Administrator



### Regulations You Should Know

**It is Unlawful to . . .**

- Transport watercraft without removing the drain plug.
- Arrive at a lake access with drain plug in place.
- Transport any prohibited species on public roads.
- Launch a watercraft with prohibited species attached.
- Transport water from Minnesota lakes or rivers.
- Dispose of live bait into the water.

**Penalties up to \$1,000**

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## STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!



- ✓ Remove aquatic plants and invasive species off your boat.
- ✓ Drain your live well and remove your drain plug.
- ✓ Dispose of used bait in the trash.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:**  
[www.co.polk.mn.us/ais](http://www.co.polk.mn.us/ais)

## Plat book features updated property ownership, GIS maps

The most recent edition of the Polk County Plat Book is available at the County Taxpayer Service Center Office in the Government Center in Crookston. The price is \$30.

An additional charge of \$5.95 is made for mail orders. Information about ordering is available by calling the office at 218-281-3464.

Published in 2015, the 188-page spiral-bound book features property ownership data. It has aerial view GIS maps along with map pages that show ownership of all land parcels of 5 acres

or more along with ditches, roads, etc. A landowner index is included for cross referencing. Premium wall maps are also available.

The book has maps of the school districts, ambulance districts and commissioner districts as well as those of 4-H club locations, cemeteries and lakes. An explanation of the public land survey system is also included.