

February 1999

## Affeldt joins County Board

Polk County government begins 1999 with one new member of the board of commissioners and new resolve to climb out from under its lingering budget problems.

The new board member is District 4 Commissioner Warren Affeldt, Fosston, who won a four-year term in the November election. He has assumed the seat previously held by Rupert Syverson, McIntosh. Syverson did not seek re-election and retired after representing the district for 12 years.

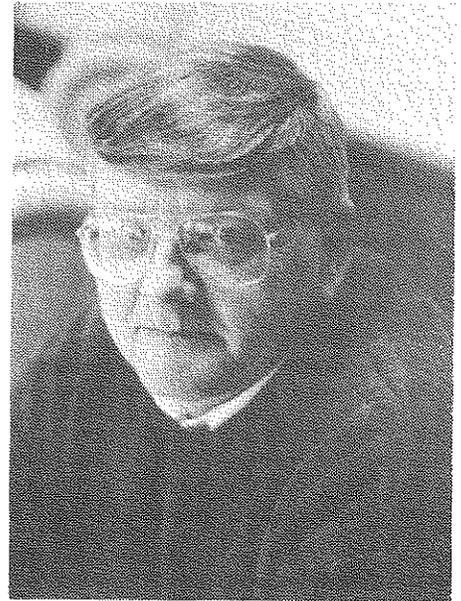
Also taking the oath of office at the first meeting of the year on Jan. 5 was District 2 Commissioner Warren Strandell, who was re-elected to a second four-year term in November. County Attorney Wayne Swanson, Auditor-Treasurer Gerald Amiot, Recorder Sheryl Hanson Cariveau and Sheriff Doug Qualley, who also were re-elected to four-year terms in the November election, took the oath of office a day earlier, on Jan. 4.

As a part of the re-organization for

1999, Strandell was elected chairman of the board succeeding Don Bakken (District 1), Fertile. Henry Vasek (District 5), Warren, was elected the vice chairman. Lyle Eisert, Crookston, is the commissioner from District 3.

"Our No. 1 focus in 1999 will be to work on getting our financial situation in order," Strandell says. "With the help of dedicated and resourceful department heads and employees, we have embarked on several measures — some very painful and some quite bold — that we expect will help to correct the problem. More adjustments are needed, of course, along with some well thought out long-range planning. The recovery must be orderly. In the process of balancing the spending and revenue, it would be a big mistake to not to provide needed services, to ignore maintenance or to neglect the good county employees who provide them.

"There isn't likely to be a quick fix and, as has been the case with flood recovery, there will be pain in process. But, with the right changes in operation, law and fund-



Warren Affeldt

ing, we will come back. After all, we aren't on the Titanic. We've taken on some water but we aren't going down," Strandell says.

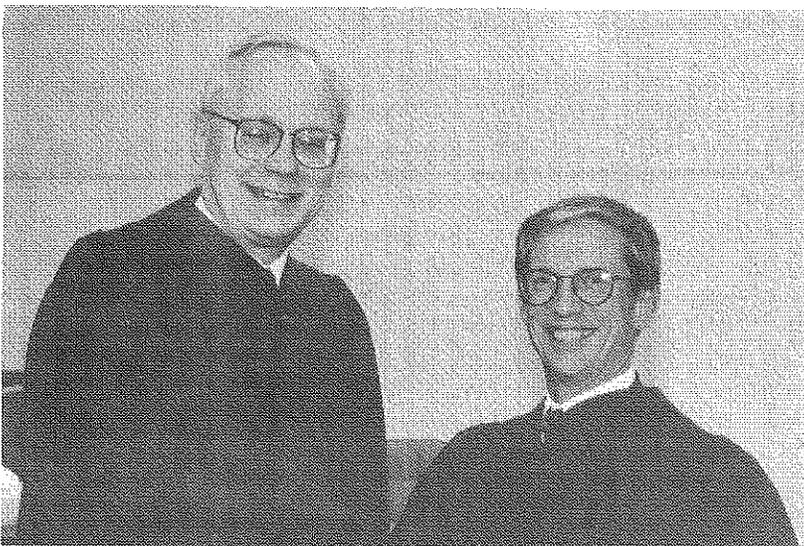
## Taylor becomes new District Court judge

Newly appointed District Court Judge Richard C. Taylor is "looking forward to the opportunity of serving the citizens of the 9th Judicial District in the role of district court judge."

Judge Taylor took the oath of office Dec. 28 from Supreme Court Justice Russell A. Anderson, who came back to his former courtroom to perform the honor of swearing in his successor. Judge Anderson joined the State Supreme Court Sept. 1 after serving as a district judge with chambers in Crookston for 16 years.

A native of Crookston, Judge Taylor graduated from

See TAYLOR, Page 3



State Supreme Court Justice Russell A. Anderson (left) returned to his former Polk County courtroom to give the oath of office to new District Court Judge Richard C. Taylor

# Syverson leaves with 'things to do'

"There are many things that I want to do. I'll give more time to my rhubarb-growing interests, do a little farming and continue to do some assessing," Rupert Syverson says of the more relaxed life that he is expecting after serving as the District 4 Polk County commissioner the past 12 years.

"The people of the district and the county employees have all been very good to work with. I was just amazed at how good they were considering all the frustrations with government," he says. Yet, it "was time for a change," he says.

A native of Hill River Township, where he continues to live, Syverson, 63, joined the county board in 1986 after advancing through a four-way primary election to win a three-way race in the general election.

"I've always had races in which there has been a strong write-in candidate," Syverson says. "When I was re-elected in 1990, there was a four-way race in the general with two write-in candidates. And in 1994, there were four of us in the primary and three in the general election."

Syverson's first election experience was in a race against incumbent commissioner Lloyd Wold in 1982. He also ran for the

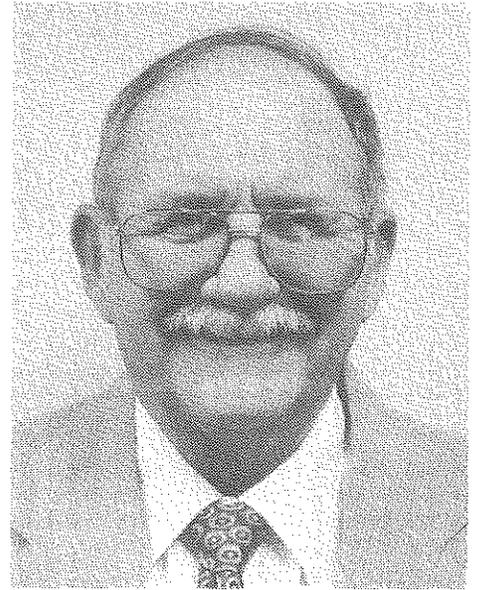
legislature in 1984 against former State Rep. Edgar Olson.

"Running for office is a good experience, win or lose. It's a lot of hard work but it gives you a whole new perspective," Syverson says.

A graduate of McIntosh High School, Syverson served in the military and, after putting himself through Bemidji State University, taught for nine years at schools in North Dakota, Montana and Colorado. After returning to McIntosh in 1974, he was an appraiser in the Polk County assessor's office for 12 years, leaving that position when he was elected a commissioner.

"It's been enjoyable being a commissioner. But the problems have become so much more severe now than when I started that the joy has been taken out of it," he says. "There are so many mandates and new programs that don't necessarily help this area of the state."

Syverson lists a zoning issue in Columbia Township and the decision to end the use of private contractors for grading roads as the most difficult issues of his tenure. The most satisfying involved completing roadwork projects in the district and the start of the practice of



**Rupert Syverson**

using citizens to serve on advisory groups to study issues in the county and make recommendations to the board.

Advisory groups were highly effective, he says, in developing the feedlot and liquor ordinances. An advisory group is currently working on the county-based purchasing alternative for providing medical services to needy persons.

## Affeldt has record of involvement

New Polk County Commissioner Warren Affeldt, Fosston, has a record of becoming actively involved in the issues that affect him and his neighbors.

Affeldt, 48, who represents District 4, succeeds Rupert Syverson, McIntosh. Syverson did not seek re-election after serving on the board for 12 years.

"I'm really looking forward to becoming involved with county government," Affeldt says. "I've always been interested in government and in politics. It's something that my family has always been interested in... my grandpa, Leland A. Affeldt Sr., was a state legislator. For me, this opportunity comes at a time when I have the time to serve. I'm looking forward to the challenge."

A native of the Fosston area, Affeldt graduated from Fosston High School in 1968 and attended the University of Minnesota for a year before serving in the Army for two years, including a year in Vietnam. After his discharge in 1971, he earned an associate degree in ag economics at North Dakota State University and was working on a bachelor's degree before he and his father, Leland A. Affeldt Jr. started a farming partnership. Affeldt quit farming in 1995 and purchased the Hillview Homes, Inc. mobile homes busi-

ness in Fosston. That business was sold last spring.

During his 23-year farming career, Affeldt served on the board of directors of the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers for nine years and was state president in 1992. He also served two years on the board of directors of the National Association of Wheat Growers and has testified on farm issues both in St. Paul and Washington.

As an appointee of Gov. Rudy Perpich, Affeldt served a three-year term on the Minnesota Transportation Study Board. The board was created to develop the state's 25-year transportation plan. He also served on the Fosston Co-op Elevator board for 12 years, including six years as president, and was on the Fosston Ag Service Board for nine years. He's been on church boards and is a member of the Fosston Lions Club.

"I'm not a micro-manager and believe that the primary role of the county board is to deal with the budget and policy issues," Affeldt says. "I like to think that I can be a problem-solver and I try to be a good listener."

Affeldt and his wife, Deborah (Krogstad), have a daughter, Kelly, who is a freshman at the University of North Dakota, and a son, Mike, a junior at Fosston High School.

# Mager named ditch inspector as County goes to 'in-house' engineering program

Polk County now has its own "in-house" program for managing and maintaining about 1,000 miles of ditches in the county system.

Created by the County Board in an effort to reduce the cost of repairs and increase efficiency, the plan became operational late last fall with the hiring of Roger Diesen as county ditch engineer and Wayne Mager as county ditch inspector.

Mager's position was created to perform duties that require a knowledge of repair needs, ditch law and long-term maintenance planning but do not require being a registered engineer.

Under the new arrangement, requests for inspection and ditch work can be initiated either of two ways — by contacting either Diesen or Mager at the County Highway Department or by contacting the county commissioner for that district.

"The new arrangement," Diesen says, "has been designed to simplify the procedure and provide for a quicker response. And we expect it to be cheaper for the benefited landowners." A savings is expected by having Diesen be responsible for engineering design and sign-off while Mager performs the field duties, work inspections and planning.

The time spent on individual ditch work, whether by Diesen, Mager and/or county surveyors (when needed), will continue to be billed to that respective ditch system and assessed to the benefited landowners. In the past, the county had contracted with private firms for all engineering and inspection work. Most recently, those services were provided by



Wayne Mager

the Widseth, Smith, Nolting & Associates firm in Crookston.

"To further facilitate ditch cleaning and repair, the county will include ditch work in its annual solicitation of equipment rental bids. That way we will be able to hire contractors at prices that were previously bid," Diesen says.

Diesen had the dual responsibility of serving as both highway and ditch engineer for nine years when he worked in Marshall County (1975-84).

"In this new program, which is much the same as the one we had in Marshall County, petitioners will need to get property owners adjacent to the ditch to agree to have the spoil placed on their lands," Diesen says. "This requirement ensures

that the adjacent landowners support the project and eliminates some of the problems that can occur. The county commissioner in that district must also sign off on a request."

Before coming to Polk County, Mager had been an engineering technician/surveyor in Marshall County for the past 12 years. His responsibilities included field-end ditch work and administrative duties.

A 1982 graduate of Alvarado High School, Mager completed the automotive parts service program at Northwest Technical College-East Grand Forks and worked in that field for several years before earning an associate of applied science degree in soil and water civil engineering at the University of Minnesota-Crookston. He has also worked for the West Polk County Soil & Water Conservation District and for the Middle River-Snake River Watershed District.

"It's probably good that I came to Polk County during what is usually the slow period for ditch work," Mager says of his November work start. "That way, there is more time to learn the county system. I'm really looking forward to the challenge... to meeting the people and working with them."

Mager and his wife, Kaye, live near Sherack (Route 3, East Grand Forks).

---

## Polk County Board of Commissioners

Don Bakken, Fertile  
Warren Strandell, East Grand Forks  
Lyle Eisert, Crookston  
Warren Affeldt, Fosston  
Henry Vasek, Warren

The board meetings are held at:

- 8:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday
- 1:20 p.m. on the third Tuesday
- 8:30 a.m. on the fourth Tuesday

Meetings are open to the public. For special accommodations or to request a spot on the agenda, call John Schmalenberg, Polk County coordinator, 281-5408.

---

## Taylor

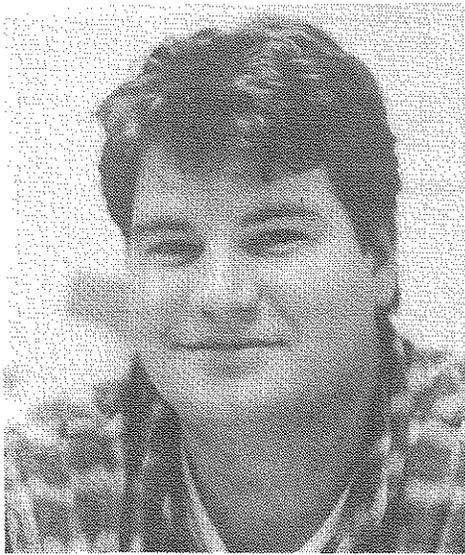
Continued from Page 1

Crookston Central High School in 1960 and then earned an industrial engineering degree at the University of North Dakota. He graduated with honors from the UND Law School in 1967 and served four years as a criminal trial attorney in the U.S. Army Advocate General Corps. One year of his tour of duty was spent in Vietnam where he was awarded the Bronze Star.

He returned to Crookston in 1971, join-

ing the firm of Padden, Dickel, Johannson & Wall, which during the 28 years he was with the practice changed to Johannson, Taylor, Rust & Fagerlund, PA.

Judge Taylor and his wife, MaryJane, have three children: David and his wife, Jennifer, live in Longmont, CO; Allison lives in Anchorage, AK; and Kevin is a senior at Concordia College, Moorhead.



Jon Steiner



Scott Deckert



Nancy Klinkhammer

## Planning & Zoning now at full strength

After almost two years of operating shorthanded, the Planning & Zoning Division of the Polk County Environmental Services Department is finally again at full strength.

The second of two vacancies was filled Dec. 14 with the arrival of Scott Deckert. An environmental technician, he will be actively involved with both the hazardous waste program and planning and zoning issues, especially septic system permit applications and inspections.

Openings in the department occurred in February 1997 when planning & zoning administrator Kathleen "Kitty" Kennedy resigned to become zoning administrator for the City of Ely, MN, and when department director (waste management/planning & zoning) Katherine Logan left in June 1997 to join her husband in Rochester, MN.

Jon Steiner, who had been an environmental technician with the department for two years when the changes began occurring, was named the planning & zoning administrator in March 1997 to succeed Kennedy and then also selected to succeed Logan as director of the department. In addition to normal duties of the position, Steiner has also directed the county's voluntary acquisition and demolition flood recovery programs.

A native Coon Rapids, MN, Steiner earned a degree in environmental science at St. Cloud State University. He worked for the Anoka County Parks Department; at a Twin Cities manufacturing

plant; and at RECOMP, a St. Cloud, MN, solid waste transfer station and composting facility, before coming to Polk County.

Nancy Klinkhammer, who joined the department as an environmental technician in April 1997 "right after the flood," has been interim planning & zoning coordinator for the past seven months. A native of Valley City, ND, she has bachelors degrees in secondary education-biology and in occupational safety/environmental services, both from the University of North Dakota. Her previous work experience includes a year with the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Agency (OSHA) in Bismarck, ND.

"It's been very busy, especially with all the activity involved with the flood buy-out and demolition programs, but I've really enjoyed my time here. It has been a perfect learning experience. It was hands-on right away," Klinkhammer says.

A native of Owatonna, MN, Deckert has a bachelors degree in biology from Pillsbury College, Owatonna, and a masters degree in environmental sciences from Mankato State University. He and his wife, Jennifer, a registered nurse who is working at Riverview Nursing Home, recently moved to Crookston.

Deckert previously worked a year as an intern at Steele County Environmental Services Department. "I really wanted to stay in Minnesota," he says of job opportunities. "I'm looking forward to working with the people of Polk County."

## Courthouse, Professional Building get new phone system

The old telephone system in Polk County Courthouse has been replaced.

The possibility the system would malfunction and be rendered unrepairable had been a great concern for county officials the last two. First installed in 1984, the system had deteriorated to the point where it was difficult to keep it operational. Many replacement parts were no longer available.

When the switchboard failed recently, the Social Services Department was

forced to make arrangements to borrow an old switchboard that had become available through Riverview Hospital following the upgrade of its system.

The new county system, provided by Garden State Telephone Co., Erskine, on the basis of its low bid of \$122,000, has many advantages, including the ability to offer conferencing, voice mail and other advanced phone services. As a part of the project, both copper and fiber optic cable were buried to connect the Courthouse and

nearby Professional Building. This enables all offices in both buildings to utilize a single phone system. The fiber optic cable will be used to enhance computer-networking ability between county offices and the State of Minnesota. Additional connections to the network are being planned to include Public Health Service, Law Enforcement Center, Highway Department and Environmental Services. Savings are expected in maintenance and service cost with the new system.

## Factors include high lake levels, flood, sale prices...

# Property values are unsettled

This is a topsy-turvy time as it concerns property values in Polk County. To-wit, the 25 percent valuation increases given to Maple Lake and Cable Lake properties for 1999.

In almost every classification values are going up, with lake properties leading the way, according to Polk County Assessor Rob Wagner.

But before Maple and Cable Lake property owners hit the roof, it must be noted that an approximate 25 percent valuation increase will not mean a 25 percent increase in property taxes. The Minnesota Limited Market Value Law restricts tax calculations to a 10 percent increase in value and many of these properties already have a limited value.

According to state law, valuation for all properties is based on comparable sales that have occurred in that area. And the law requires that properties be valued at from 90 to 105 percent of their actual sale or market value.

"People have to realize that it is not what they paid for their home, or the amount of money that they have invested in a home that determines its valuation," Wagner says. "Valuation is determined by what that home or property would sell for in today's market.

"We, in the assessor's office, are always trying to educate the public on how the system works," he says. "If people understand the system, they are more likely to accept it. They might not like it... but they are more likely to accept it."

Despite the high-water problems that have plagued properties on both Union Lake and Lake Sarah, recorded sales of those properties indicates that a similar adjustment should also be made there, Wagner says.

"We aren't, however, making adjustments on the Union Lake and Lake Sarah properties at this time because we are concerned about the high-water problems and its effect on their values," Wagner says. "In fact, we are adjusting downward the values of the properties there that were physically damaged or have suffered 'loss of access' because of the high water. Properties have been viewed by the Polk County Assessor's Office from both land and water. Polk County commissioners have also viewed the high water problems from the lake side.

"While we as a county are not adjusting (upward) those property values, I suspect that the State of Minnesota will mandate appropriate adjustments. The sales certificates that we see show that all lake property values are escalating dramatically. Even some of the properties that were physically damaged have sold."

In defense of a state-mandated valuation increase for

Union Lake and Lake Sarah properties, Wagner notes, that if an increase isn't done now, a horrendous increase would be in the works for the time when the water problem finally does go away. "So, it might actually be better to take it a step at a time rather than get hit all at once a few years down the road. "The state doesn't usually increase valuations by more than 20 percent," he says. "During our State Board of Equalization session, we were able to delay increases in valuation for the 1998 assessment on Union Lake and Lake Sarah. However, the sales continue to rise.

In East Grand Forks where virtually every home suffered flood damage in 1997, the surviving properties that have since been restored have now been returned to their pre-flood values. "But the finished basement value was removed from the valuation for those homes where it was not repaired to its finished or pre-flood condition," he says.

New homes in East Grand Forks, where there were over 100 new 'home starts' in 1998, will come onto the tax roll based on their percentage of completion on Jan. 2 of each year. "If a new home was built on a bare lot in a new development," Wagner says, "it will likely be taxed at the previous bare land classification for the first year. It won't be taxed at the full value until the following year."

Gone from the tax rolls, of course, are those 460 homes and other commercial properties in East Grand Forks that were destroyed and have since been removed. They were removed from the county valuation total prior to calculations of 1999 property taxes.

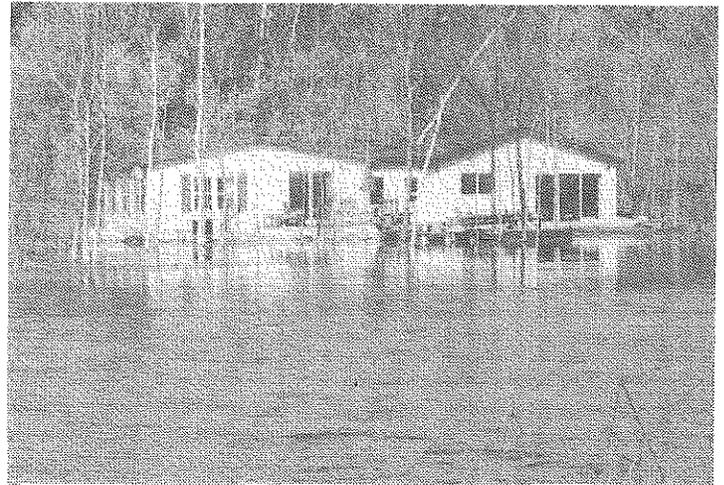
Based on values provided when building permits were taken out, he says, the value of properties lost to the flood in East Grand Forks has almost been made up and will likely be fully made up in 1999. Those properties, however, will not likely be assessed at full value until their second year of existence depending on their percent of completion.

Comparable sales of properties in most classifications, especially homes, have increased throughout the county. Several state-mandated valuation increases have occurred in Polk County in recent years — beginning in pre-flood East Grand Forks and continuing through Crookston, Fosston and Fertile — and more may be in the works. Ag lands have also undergone state-mandated valuation increases in several areas of the county in previous years.

Despite problems on the farm, ag land values have not yet shown a decrease in valuation, Wagner says. "There hasn't been a trend either way, so we are holding those values the same in 1999 that they were in 1998.



**Assessor Rob Wagner**



These homes on Union Lake are among those that are battling the high lake levels. The high water problem also affects properties on nearby Lake Sarah but the problems aren't reducing values.

## Property taxes

Continued from Page 5

"Even in real bad times, the land is the last thing that sells, so if there is a decrease in valuation based on sales it is often a delayed reaction and doesn't show up for several years," he says.

A land classification that is likely to be reviewed, however, is that of "woods and pasture." Based on sales, some woods and pasture values have jumped dramatically. The classification for land that is being purchased specifically for hunting purposes, may have to be changed to "seasonal recreation." A problem with that change, Wagner says, is determining the actual use of the

land.

Wagner notes that Board of Review notices will be sent to all county property owners this spring. "Normally, only property owners who get a \$1,000 or more increase in valuation or who receive a classification change are sent the Board of Review notice," he says.

"But the changes this year affect so many property owners that we decided to send them to everyone. The Board of Review is the place to challenge valuation and classification changes. However, taxpayers with questions or concerns may

contact the Polk County Assessor's Office prior to the Board of Review. Property taxes don't increase at the same percentage of valuation increases, he says. "Valuation increases build the tax base and as the tax base broadens, it spreads out the tax dollar."

## Pilot project to use waste ash in road surfacing

Plans are being finalized for a pilot project in Polk County that will test the use of waste combustor ash from the incinerator at Fosston as a substitute for a portion of gravel in the development of bituminous roads.

Involved in the project are the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance, Pollution Control Agency, and Department of Transportation. County participants are the Environmental Services, Solid Waste Resources and Highway departments.

Tests are planned on two miles of county gravel roads north and east of the University of Minnesota-Crookston. These roads are planned for reconstruction and surfacing this summer.

The project will use about 4,000 tons, or 80 percent of the 5,000 tons of ash produced annually at the incinerator. This use would result in an extension of the life of the landfill while providing an estimated annual savings of up to \$100,000 in disposal and management costs of the incinerator.

## Web sites offer information on legislation & government

Want to know more about what is going on at the Capitol and in state government?

There's all kinds of information available on the internet. A good place to start might be with one of these addresses:

[www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis](http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis)

[www.senate.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us)

[www.house.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us)

These sites will allow you to read the full text of House and Senate bills, or just the introductions and summaries. You can track legislation and keep an eye on the House and Senate committee schedules.

You can even subscribe to a "listserv"

electronic mailing service that will automatically E-mail those committee schedules to you on a daily basis.

There's a section on "how a bill becomes law." And there are links to all kinds of general information, including the staff member directory with telephone numbers and E-mail addresses of legislators.

Another address worth checking out:

[www.mncounties.org](http://www.mncounties.org)

This is the Association of Minnesota Counties web site. All 87 counties are members of AMC. You can find out the organization's stand on issues and get a good idea of the lobbying that is being done for counties.

## Rural flood-damaged homes being acquired, removed

Polk County has purchased a number of rural homes located in the 100-year flood plain which sustained structural damage in excess of 50 percent of the value of the home.

The Voluntary Acquisition Program is funded through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program with 75 percent of the funds coming from Minnesota Recovers Task Force, 12.5 percent from the Department of Natural Resources and 12.5 percent from the Department of Trade & Economic Development. The demolition of those acquired homes is funded 100 percent by the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

Polk County had originally identified 25 homes that were located within the 100-year flood plain and sustained over 50 percent damage. Of these 25 homes, one homeowner has demolished the home and rebuilt to current flood plain standards, two homeowners have withdrawn from the program, and 16 homeowners have taken part in the acquisi-

tion program. The remainder of the eligible properties are in various stages of the participation process. To date, more than \$737,000 has been spent on acquiring these eligible flood-damaged homes.

Nine structures have been bought back by the original homeowner and relocated. Three of the nine structures were homes which have been bought back, relocated out of the flood plain and renovated.

Many of the acquired homes have been cleaned out by Polk County. Appliances, tires, municipal solid waste, fluorescent bulbs and household hazardous wastes have been removed to prepare for the demolition of these structures. Demolition is tentatively planned to begin in late spring 1999 and conclude by fall 1999.

Additionally, more than \$80,000 has been distributed to rural Polk County residents to help in the recovery effort through the county's lot incentive and gap loan financing programs. — **Jon Steiner, director of environmental services**

## County Attorney's Office gives up new position for budget

Despite experiencing its most demanding year ever in 1998, the Polk County Attorney's Office will not immediately fill an open position of assistant county attorney. The measure is being taken, according to County Attorney Wayne Swanson, to help the county fight through its budget problems.

"This is a position that we really need because of an ever increasing workload but now is just not the right time to try to refill it," Swanson says. "We did get a new position in the department during 1998, which really helped because it came at a time when we were going through the murder trials, but because of the budget problems, we'll revert back to our previous staff strength." The position that will not now be filled became vacant when Nancy Kloster left in December to join her new husband in Japan.

The position was created last April when Sarah Barron joined the department as an assistant county attorney. A native of Montana who grew up in upstate New York, Barron had previous-

ly clerked for District Judge Russell A. Anderson for three years. Barron earned a bachelors degree from Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH, and a doctorate from Ohio State University, before graduating from Cleveland Marshall College of Law in Cleveland, OH, in 1995. She spent her final year of law school as a visiting student at the University of North Dakota School of Law.

Barron and her husband, John Madden, an assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders at UND, have lived in Grand Forks since 1994. They have two daughters, Molly, 16, and Katie, 11.

Other members of the department, their positions and lengths of service are: Norma Johnson, office manager, 20 years; Wayne Swanson, 20 years; Larry Orvik, assistant county attorney, 10 years; Rhea Grove, assistant office manager, 10 years; Anita DeFrang, victim assistance specialist, 5 years; Debbie Berhow, receptionist/legal secretary, 5 years; Scott Buhler, assistant county attorney, 5 years; and Pam Cournia, legal secretary, 5 years.

## Has public use potential County-based purchasing plan is submitted

Polk County has submitted its initial plan to state offices for a county-based purchasing program that would provide medical services for medical assistance (MA) and general assistance medical care (GAMC) clients.

The plan was submitted Dec. 1 to the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Human Services and is currently under review, according to county coordinator Jack Schmalenberg, who has directed the county effort.

The importance of the plan to Polk County is twofold — one that it would give a local health provider network the opportunity to provide services (as opposed to health plans selected statewide) and two that it is expected to prevent any cost-shifting to the property tax system providing potential cost-savings to the county.

"We think it is important to try to support our local providers... to keep facilities like our local hospitals, nursing homes, drug stores and other professionals in our communities," says County Commissioner Don Bakken, Fertile, who has been an active proponent of the program. The alternative, he says, is to become part of the state plan that would solicit services through large HMOs (health maintenance organizations) and insurance companies.

While still in the investigative stage, Schmalenberg sees the possibility of a county-based program becoming available to the general public at some time in the future. "It's possible that a county-run plan could offer affordable medical coverage for such groups as farmers, independent business people and others who are not in group plans. It might even work for our county employees," he says. "This is something that has to be worked out but it might be the answer for a lot of folks in the county."

The county plan has been developed over a period of several months with involvement from these health professionals and consumers: Kristen Anderson, Diane Bachmeier, Sandra Bentley, Dr. Steven Biermaier, Dr. Steven Gander, Dr. Rolf Hanson, David Hubbard, Kent Johnson, Gloria Kaste, Sue Knutson, Tom Lenertz, Scott Maves, Brenda Menier, William Montague, Dr. Wesley Ofstedal, Barbara Oseth, Doug Peterson, Barry Robertson, Mike Siekas, Dr. Paul Stadem, Dr. Troy Storlie, Betty Tangen, Kathleen Twite and Dan Wilson.

# 'Waiting list' being used as jail crowding problem hits home

The list of people convicted of crimes and waiting to serve time at the Northwest Regional Correction Center in Crookston grew to 20 in January with no signs of slowing down any time soon, according to Tri-County Community Corrections (TCCC) Director Susan E. Mills.

Like in most areas of the state, jail crowding has become a major problem for TCCC, which is the three-county agency (Norman, Polk and Red Lake counties) that operates the Correctional Center.

The 81-bed facility (both adult minimum and maximum security beds) had a daily average of 48 residents in 1989. By 1998, that average had grown to 75, a number that far exceeds the 75 percent of capacity maximum (60 beds) established by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. The high number of residents during the past year was more than 100.

In addition to keeping persons on a waiting list to serve their time, TCCC was forced to "buy" up to 15 beds a day at other jails in the region and state during late November and early December.

TCCC is currently participating in an eight-county jail task force that has employed a consultant to help determine jail needs in northwestern Minnesota. Besides the three member counties of TCCC, other counties in the study are Becker, Clay, Clearwater, Mahnommen and Wadena.

For TCCC, the jail space needs, along with lost revenues, have contributed to budget problems. "When we increased from 36 to 49 beds at the annex (by expanding to the second floor of that minimum security facility), it meant that we had

to add three fulltime and several part-time security staff positions. Costs for programming increased as a result of the additional residents, too," Mills says.

While there was an increase in expenses because of the annex expansion, the move saved much more than it cost, Mills notes. "If we would have had to 'buy' 13 beds at \$50 a day at another facility, it would have cost us \$237,000. And, since we already have a waiting list of people who have to serve time, we could assume that we would need all 13 beds over the course of the year."

The result of both increased operating costs and lost revenue have contributed to a financial problem that required a \$300,000 budget reduction for 1999. "Our budget problems would have been much greater without the annex expansion. To meet that \$300,000 amount, we've had to cut 4.5 FTE (fulltime equivalent) positions. Two positions are being cut through attrition and another 2.5 positions have been eliminated. In addition, the three counties have each increased their cost-share contributions by three percent," Mills says.

Budget problems aren't new to TCCC this year, she says. "Polk County's budget difficulties have been impacting us for the past five years. And with increased numbers of people in jail, we've had increased costs.

"We aren't alone with jail crowding or budget problems, though. It's a statewide issue. We're asking the Legislature to help us out... both on our own and through the Association of Minnesota Counties."

## County, township roads benefit from gravel tax collections

Both township and county road systems will benefit from the "gravel tax" monies that are now being aggressively collected in Polk County.

Those revenues were increased greatly last year when county officials began strictly enforcing M.S. 298.75, the aggregate material tax law. As a result, collections — at the rate of 10 cents per cubic yard — were increased from \$3,326 in 1997 to \$78,035 in 1998.

The tax, which has been in effect in 22 Minnesota counties since 1986, is imposed on operators and/or importers when aggregate materials are sold or transported from stockpile.

By law, the money is to be used to repair and maintain roads used in gravel hauling activity. It is to be distributed as follows: 60 percent to the county road &

bridge fund; 30 percent to the township and/or city road & bridge fund; and 10 percent to a county fund for the restoration of abandoned pits on public or tax-forfeited lands.

County Auditor-Treasurer Gerald Amiot is currently working with township officials to determine how the funds earmarked for townships will be proportioned.

Dave Goosen, who retired as the county road maintenance superintendent just over a year ago, was employed to coordinate and enforce the tax collection program. Working on a part-time basis, Goosen used knowledge gained from 39 years of employment with the County Highway Department to help determine the amount of aggregate removed from pits during the past year. The cost of Goosen's services totaled \$3,048.

## Health insurance costs jump for County, too

Health insurance costs have been going up all over with those for Polk County employees no exception. The premium for coverage provided for county employees is up 28 percent in 1999, according to Jack Schmalenberg, county coordinator.

The cost of the basic plan offered county employees through Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Minnesota was increased from \$149.93 per month in 1998 to \$190.11 per month in 1999. Similarly, the cost for the higher deductible, "first dollar" plan increased from \$182.20 to \$231.03 per month.