

Polk County Newsletter

Fall 2000

FREE
Take One

Revenue pact sought in Tilden transfer

It's still not a done deal, but the intentions are in place for an arrangement to ensure that the Tilden Farm properties will continue to support local governments despite eventually being owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The Nature Conservancy, which completed the purchase of the 23,399-acre farming and gravel operation in late August, intends to transfer ownership to the Fish & Wildlife Service so that the land — located in Grove Park-Tilden, Onstad, Godfrey, Kertsonville and Gentilly townships in central Polk County — can be restored as a tall grass prairie and wetland.

The county's interest in the ownership transfer, and that of the affected townships, school districts, and watersheds, too, has been the possible loss of the real estate tax dollars produced by the property.

"We've had several conversations with Ron Nargang (assistant state director for The Nature Conservancy of Minnesota), and he has agreed to discuss all of the tax issues. We expect to have everything settled before the land would be transferred to Fish & Wildlife," Polk County Board Chair Warren Affeldt reports.

The non-profit Nature Conservancy is proposing to establish an

endowment fund of about \$2 million with earnings from that investment to be used to continue to pay the real estate taxes, or an equivalent amount to the local government units. The fund would be established and maintained by money from gravel sales, from rent for those lands that would continue to be farmed, and from the sale of several parcels that do not fit with Fish & Wildlife plans.

Affeldt, who has taken the lead role for the county in the tax preservation discussions, says the agreement would be attached to the abstract to keep it from being altered at some time in the future.

The Tilden Farms properties currently pay \$94,353 in real estate taxes and another \$13,429 in special assessments for ditch maintenance. Polk County receives the largest portion of the tax, \$41,768. Five townships share in \$11,143 of revenue with Grove Park-Tilden receiving the most at \$8,249. The Crookston, Fertile and Red Lake Falls school districts share a total of \$15,040, while the Red Lake Watershed District receives \$1,412. The Sand Hill Watershed District and Northwest Regional Development Commission receive only minimal amounts.

Bakken, Eisert to retire from County Board

48 years of knowledge, experience to be missed

A lot of knowledge and experience in dealing with county government issues will be lost when veteran Polk County Commissioners Don Bakken, Fertile, and Lyle Eisert, Crookston, retire at the end of the year.



Don Bakken

Bakken, who has won election and/or re-election seven times in District 1, will mark 20 years on the board when his term ends. He was first elected in 1980 when he carried 72 percent of the vote. He won a two-year term in 1982 when re-districting required a special election and then was re-elected to regular four-year terms in 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1996.

When the year ends, Eisert will have completed 12 years as a commissioner and, including 28 years as a deputy sheriff, a total of 40 years as a county employee.

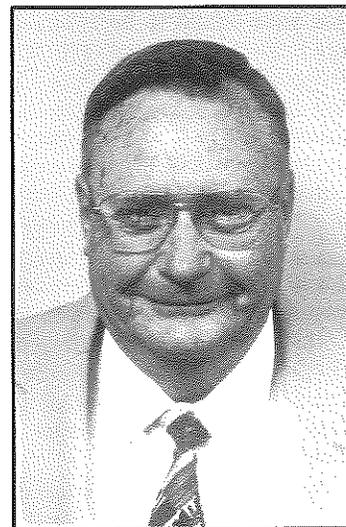
After being elected as the District 3 commissioner for the

first time in 1988, Eisert was re-elected to four-year terms in 1992 and 1996. His time in the Polk County Sheriff's Department includes three years as the director of emergency management.

Extensive portfolios

Both commissioners have carried extensive portfolios, have served as chair of the county board several times, and have held numerous other responsibilities.

Eisert has served on and been a member of the International Water Coalition, Association of Minnesota Counties' Environment and Natural Resources Committee, Minnesota Rural Counties Caucus, Tri-County Community Corrections Board, Lake Agassiz Library Board, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Northwest Regional Development Commission, Polk County Committee on Aging, Minnesota Emergency Man-



Lyle Eisert

Continued on Page 2

Bakken, Eisert to retire

Continued from Page 1

agers Association (past president and voted outstanding elected official), Polk County Law Enforcement Association (past president), Northwest Mental Health Board, and several other boards, commissions and organizations dealing with water, ditches, health and law enforcement.

Eisert and his wife, Iris, have two daughters, Kristi (Mrs. Bob) Holder, Houston, TX, and Kimberly (Mrs. Mark) Windland, Maple Plain, MN., and three granddaughters.

"I plan to enjoy life," he says of his impending retirement. "I think I'll just sit in the chair for the first eight hours... even before I start rocking. Iris and I plan to do a little traveling, visit our daughters and their families, and do a lot of the other things we've always wanted to do."

Many involvements

Bakken operated a construction and trucking firm before phasing into fulltime county commissioner work in more recent years. He has had extensive involvements in the health and human services area having served on the Minnesota Human Services Advisory Board, Minnesota Department of Health's executive and advisory committees, Polk County Public Health Board, Polk County Development Achievement Center Board of Directors, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Regional Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Committee, Polk County EMS Advisory Board, and the Association of Minnesota

Counties (AMC) Human Services Policy Committee and its sub-committee on welfare reform. He has also had a lead role in the effort to establish Polk County as a community-based purchasing organization that would arrange local health services for social service clients.

As a leader in the area of solid waste disposal, Bakken has served as chair of the five-county Solid Waste Advisory Board that oversees operation of the Polk County Incinerator at Fosston, and he is a member of the 10-county Northwest Minnesota Household Hazardous Waste Joint Powers Board. Other involvements have included serving on the Northwest Regional Development Commission, Minnesota Rural Counties Caucus, Polk County Extension Service Committee, and several ditch committees. He is the current vice chair of the eight-county District 3 AMC Directors organization.

Bakken and his wife, Jan (Knutson) have four children and 10 grandchildren. The children are: Brian and Renae (Mrs. Wayne) Carlson, both of Minneapolis; Heidi (Mrs. Kurt) Larson, of Fertile; and Brent of Houston, Tex.

"I've really enjoyed being a commissioner," he says. "I've liked working with the people and I thank them for having allowed me to represent them for the past 20 years. It has been an honor. My plans now are to work, travel and play a little bit."

Flood property acquisitions complete; demolition underway

Polk County has acquired 20 properties that were found to be substantially damaged as a result of the 1997 flood. Properties acquired by Polk County have had all structures removed, and the site restored to a natural condition. As required by the grant guidelines, all acquired properties must be kept free of structures, and in a compatible open space land use.

A second acquisition program started in the spring of 2000, focusing on a subdivision located along the Red River in Grand Forks Township just north of East Grand Forks. Substantially damaged structures and those identified as probable flood hazards within this subdivision have been identified.

Twelve additional properties in these categories have now also been acquired in this

area. The goal of the program was to extend a purchase offer to each homeowner in this identified area.

Several of these structures were repurchased by the original homeowner and moved to a new location. Demolition activities are either underway or have been concluded with all activities scheduled to be concluded this fall when the grants which fund these programs expire.

This second acquisition and demolition program is funded through remaining funds from the first project, and has been supplemented through two grant amendments with the Department of Trade & Economic Development (DTED) and Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

— **Jon Steiner, Polk County director of environmental services**

Primary Election Results

District 1

Jerry Jacobson	489
Gene Dufault	421
Larry Altringer	389
Ray Christian	222

District 3

Bill Montague	567
Don Diedrich	378
Lynn Wilhite	132
Ray Ecklund	73
Jerry Duphorn	50

District 5

Eugene "Jeep" Mattson	265
*Henry Vasek	170
Richard Kuzel	110
David Tucker	77

* - incumbent

The top two vote-getters in each district advance to the General Election on Tuesday, Nov. 7, with the winners to begin four-year terms on Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2001.

Polk County Board of Commissioners

- Dist. 1 — Don Bakken, Fertile
- Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell, East Grand Forks
- Dist. 3 — Lyle Eisert, Crookston
- Dist. 4 — Warren Affeldt, Fosston
- Dist. 5 — Henry Vasek, Warren

Board meetings are held at:

- 8:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of each month.
- 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.

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Polk County
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Auditor-Treasurer's
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\$48 each**

(This is the latest edition)

Cariveau completes 36-year career in County Recorder's Office

Sheryl Cariveau will end a 36-year career in the Polk County Recorder's Office when she retires at the end of September.

"I came here right from high school and I've been here ever since," she says. "I never thought I'd be here this long, but it has been very enjoyable. We've really been busy since the flood three years ago."

After starting as a clerk-typist in 1964 after graduating from Fertile-Beltrami High School, Cariveau became administrative assistant in 1977 and then was appointed by the County Board on July 1, 1985, to succeed the retiring LaVerne Sorlie as recorder. Cariveau was elected to her first four-year term as recorder

in 1986 and then was re-elected in 1990, 1994 and 1998.

"My first boss was Walt Acker. When I came to work we were in the old courthouse and it was the Register of Deeds Office. It wasn't until 1977 that the name was changed to Recorder's Office," Cariveau says. "We had those old Royal manual typewriters. We got a new Hermes manual typewriter when we moved into the new building in 1968. We got one new Hermes electric typewriter when we went to microfilming records in 1974. We started using computers in 1985, but we still use electric typewriters to fill out certain forms.

"It will be 36 years and one month at the end of

September," she says. "I'm ready. There comes a time when you want to do something else. With all the government mandates and other changes that keep coming, I just don't want to do this any longer. But it has been enjoyable. I have been very fortunate."

In retirement, Cariveau and her husband, Gary, who live in East Grand Forks, plan to travel, watch their grandchildren's ballgames and spend more time at their lake home. Gary Cariveau retired several years ago as chief of police in East Grand Forks.

"And we want to do a lot of things we've never had time to do before," she says. Cariveau has a daughter, Shelly Hanson,



Sheryl Cariveau

who teaches in Crookston, and six stepchildren: Gary (Bridgid) Cariveau Jr., East Grand Forks; Lisa (Gary) Feltman, Warsaw, N.D.; Jeff (Arnette) Cariveau, East Grand Forks; LeAnn (Ron) Holte, East Grand Forks; Lynn (Jason) Kotrba, East Grand Forks; and Jay (Renee) Cariveau, Spartanburg, S.C. There are 11 grandchildren.

Hanson appointed to complete term

Marlene Hanson, a veteran of 23 years in the County Recorder's office including the last 15 as the administrative assistant, will succeed Sheryl Cariveau as Polk County recorder on Sept. 30.

A native of Anoka, Minn., and a resident of Polk County since 1965, Hanson has been named by the County Board to complete the final two years of the term of Sheryl Cariveau, who is completing a 36-year career in the office.

"Sheryl was a wonderful boss. She trained me well... she taught me everything," Hanson says of her impending move to the county recorder position. "We've had lots of fun and

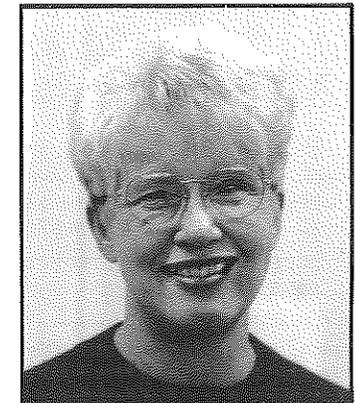
good times, and I'm going to miss her terribly."

After living in the Twin Cities for three years following their marriage, Hanson and her husband, Lew, who grew up at Stephen, Minn., decided that they wanted a small town life in which to raise their family and moved to Polk County. Lew farmed in the Stephen-Middle River area until 1991 when he began driving for Transit Tec. He became general manager of the north branch of the company in 1999.

After being a "stay-at-home" mom, Hanson worked briefly at Strander Abstract, Crookston, before returning home again for a few years

when their fifth child was born. "Then when Lew Jr. was five years old, I went to work in the Recorder's Office, starting as a clerk-typist II," Hanson says. She became the administrative assistant in 1985 when LaVerne Sorlie retired as recorder and Cariveau moved up to succeed her.

The Hanson children are: Wendy (Chris) Leines, Hammel, Minn.; Kim (Bob) Stanislawski, Eagan, Minn.; Lori (James) Conway, Wahpeton, N.D.; Teri (Michael) Bauck, New York Mills, Minn.; and Lew Jr. (Shelly), Fertile. There are 11 grandchildren with another expected in October.



Marlene Hanson

"At first, I was a bit nervous, but I have a lot of experience working with the public and with government and I feel I have the knowledge and the stamina to do a good job for the county. I'm thankful for the appointment," Hanson says.

Impoundment in Brandt Township near completion

Construction of the \$1.4 million Angus-Oslo 4 Impoundment in sections 3 and 10 of Brandt Township is expected to be operational by next spring, according to Ron Adrian, managing engineer for the Middle River-Snake River Watershed District.

The 1,020-acre project is designed to control the equivalent of 3.6 inches of run-off from a 23-square-mile area in Polk, Pennington and Red Lake counties.

The impoundment's outlet will be into Judicial Ditch 25-2 which

empties into Polk County Ditch 43.

"It doesn't change where that water is going now. It just holds it and distributes it out over time," Adrian says.

Drews Construction, Frazee, is doing the work. The Red River Water Management Board is paying for 85 percent of the project with the remaining 15 percent provided from the local project funds of the Middle River-Snake River Watershed District.

Lake pumping effort proves successful

Despite a few hurdles, including a very wet early summer, the effort to pump-down the levels of Union Lake and Lake Sarah has significantly reduced the threat of additional property damage from water levels that had reached their highest marks in memory last summer.

"We've got 2.5 feet left to go," Dale Knotek, president of the Union/Lake Sarah Improvement District, said in a report to the Polk County Board on Aug. 1. "The lake levels went back up about a foot after the June rains, but things have gone well this summer and we could have the levels down to our goal by the end of September."

Pumping is allowed for a lake level reduction down to the normal high-water mark, which is the goal of the improvement district.

Started in late October 1999 and then shut down for the winter at the end of December, the initial pumping effort had reduced the level of Union Lake by about

20 inches from the high-point reached in the spring and summer of 1999. The Dec. 31 shutdown date, which was specified in the Department of Natural Resources pumping permit, came at about the same time as a failure occurred in the outlet pipe installed under Polk County Road 42 at the southwest end of the Union Lake. That pipe was repaired before pumping started again in April.

The initial 100-day pump-down phase was completed on June 7 when pumping was stopped for a five-week break for wildlife nesting. During that time, the permanent 75 horsepower electric pump was installed. Pumping resumed July 12 using the new power source. The first pumping efforts last year had been powered by a farm tractor with pumping this spring powered by a diesel truck engine.

Last fall and through the end of 1999, pumping was allowed at a rate up to 20 cfs. Pumping rates this summer have been permitted by the Corps of Engineers at 15 cfs.

Once the lake level is reduced to the ordinary high water mark, pumping will be curtailed. It can be resumed when the level increases to one foot above that mark.

The project includes a protected interconnection between the two lakes that allows water from Lake Sarah to move into Union Lake. Water pumped out of Union Lake goes into the Sand Hill River system.

Property owners in the improvement district have assessed themselves the \$610,000 cost of the project. Additional project and operating costs for the pumping, maintenance, and the lab work that must be done to ensure that the quality of water entering the river system is maintained are also being paid for by the lake property owners.

Besides Knotek, lake improvement district directors are Bev Sande, Rolland Gagner, Steve Flateland and Michael Bruggeman. Phil Weiler is the district's secretary-treasurer.

16-year veteran of corrections work

Meyer new Juvenile Detention Center director

Daryl "Oscar" Meyer, a 16-year veteran of corrections work in Polk County, is the new director of the Red River Valley Juvenile Detention Center. He succeeds Lisa Mangino, who resigned in July to take a position in private business.

The detention facility is located in the Northwest Regional Correction Center in Crookston, and is operated by the Northwest Regional Corrections Board, a regional corrections body formed in 1976 through a joint powers agreement developed by Polk, Norman and Red Lake counties.

A native of Sauk Centre, Minn., Meyer attended Central Lakes Community College, Brainerd, Minn., for a year before earning a degree in criminal justice at Bemidji State University in 1984. He has been employed by Tri County Corrections since that time, beginning in the SWAT



Daryl 'Oscar' Meyer

(special worker assisting treatment) intensive probation program. He became a counselor in the Area Learning Center in 1989, then was coordinator of the Life Skills program for a year, and served as a probation officer for six years.

For the nine months prior being named juvenile center director, Meyer served as the school-based corrections

agent at Crookston Central High School through a program funded by the Safe Schools Act.

"I'm really looking forward to this new opportunity," he says. "We're working with probation officials and the social service departments in the three counties in a review of our programs. We want them to be involved in the design of our programs and in determining the directions that we go. This is something that hasn't been done before and I'm really excited about the possibilities."

A 20-year member of the Minnesota Army National Guard, Meyer is a staff sergeant in Bravo Company 2-136, the mechanized infantry unit located in Crookston.

Meyer and his wife, Arla, who works in the Polk County Auditor-Treasurer's office, have two daughters, Ashly, 10, and Karlee, 2.

Gravel tax helps maintain roads

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

Those revenues were increased greatly when county officials began enforcing M.S. 298.75, the aggregate material tax law two years ago. 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. Collections in 1999 were \$77,654.

The money is used to repair and maintain roads used in gravel hauling activity. It is 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.

Dave Goosen, who retired two years ago as the county road maintenance superintendent, works on a part-time basis to coordinate and enforce the tax collection program.

County agrees to provide policing for City of Fosston

The Polk County Sheriff's Department is providing law enforcement protection in the City of Fosston through a recently negotiated and precedent-setting contract policing arrangement.

Under terms of the contract, which is likely to be the model for other such contracts as communities labor under the ever-increasing administrative demands associated with police protection, Polk County will provide the equivalent of two fulltime officers in Fosston at a first year annual charge of \$101,565.

Total expenses associated with the contract, including salaries, benefits, training and operations, will be adjusted at the end of each year to provide a "true-up" of the actual costs involved. The contract, which became retroactively effective on July 1, runs through Dec. 31, 2002. Initially, the service is being provided by existing Sheriff's Department staff. The two officers who will serve Fosston are to be hired under the same

length of contract terms.

"This should be a plus professionally," Sheriff Doug Qualley says. "I know for the county, it will cut down on some of our time when we are doing investigations. I think it will be a win-win situation for both city and county and that it could lead to some other communities becoming interested in a contract arrangement."

While a law enforcement committee composed of city and county representatives will serve in an advisory committee on how services will be provided, Sheriff Qualley will be the sole supervisor of the officers. The hiring process, which began immediately upon approval of the contract by the County Board on Aug. 1, is expected to have the two fulltime officers in place in Fosston by Oct. 1.

The contract policing arrangement was developed when the Fosston City Council voted 3-2 in late June to terminate its two-member police department.

Did anyone notice the court takeover?

The staff in the Polk County Court Administration Office staff has naturally seen a bit of a difference, but likely not any of the public.

That's been the assessment of the change that occurred July 1 when the State of Minnesota took over administration of the 9th Judicial District Court System including county Court Administration offices.

"The only thing we noticed," Court Administrator Sally Holewa jokes, "was that some of our checks came late. They were mailed out from St. Paul. There has been no change for the public, though, except where the funds for operation come from. Our function and operation hasn't changed."

Vendors will notice one change, however, since payments to them will not include the sales tax amount. "The state pays that amount directly to the Department of Revenue," Holewa says.

Jurors, Holewa says, should be careful when opening their mail to avoid throwing their checks away. "Checks from the state look a little like junk mail, so jurors should be careful not to throw them away," she says.

Several-year process

'Computerization' of Assessor's Office has begun

The changeover isn't going to happen overnight, but the equipment has been purchased and the start of computerization of the Polk County Assessor Office has begun.

"We're not yet anywhere near the point where we can use the new system to determine valuations," Assessor Rob Wagner says. "We might be able to do that for the 2001 assessment for a couple of districts, but that would be the earliest we could use the system as a tool for valuation. I had hoped to be further along with input by now, but I'm still pleased with the progress. It will be several years before we'll have full use of the system, although we'll be able to use it on a city-by-city and township-by-township basis earlier than that."

The complete change to a computerized system likely won't be completed for several years.

The benefits of the system, he says, include that there will be more equality in determining valuations, especially for farmland once the soil types survey information is available. "That will probably be the last part in the computerization process, but it will definitely make land

valuations much more fair and accurate," Wagner says.

"Right now, we're working to make the computer connection to the East Grand Forks office. There is an internet and software problem that is holding us up."

Because all East Grand Forks properties have been recorded on the Vanguard System since a revaluation of the entire city several years ago, it is most readily available to be transferred into the new county system, which is also a Vanguard system, Wagner notes. "But we have to get the connection problems worked out first," he says.

Currently, all county parcel numbers have been incorporated into the new system. The specific parcel information from properties in two smaller cities and for the structures in seven townships has been entered. The entry on the balance of the county is in progress. That work will be done by the individual assessors based on the records for each parcel.

"We'll be concentrating first on houses and commercial buildings with farm buildings and land to follow," Wagner says of the order in which properties are to be entered into the new computer sys-

tem.

Beyond the processing of information even to the point of calculating the tax, efficiencies of the new system include that assessors, using laptop computers, will be able to enter information into a laptop computer while in the field. That information can then be transferred directly into the computer system on the return to the office. Currently, information on properties is copied in longhand from field notes to a card system in the office.

The county's \$60,000 investment in hardware and software includes two years of support. Information in the system will be readily available to the Auditor-Treasurer's Office and the Recorder's Office, increasing their efficiencies.

"This will greatly increase our ability in determining assessments and in the accuracy and fairness of them," Wagner says. "And, it will eliminate the task for assessors to hand-write the information on the cards when they get back to the office. The time savings over transferring data by hand will free-up staff time to do more actual viewing of properties and a more thorough and complete job of the assessment process."

Planning effort addresses jail needs

The greatly reduced dollars for regional jail construction projects were vetoed in the last legislative session by Gov. Jesse Ventura, leaving many counties to return to the drawing board on jail planning.

In reaction to the lack of state funding, the Regional Corrections Board for Polk, Norman and Red Lake Counties continues to move ahead refining a jail-planning project that will meet jail space needs into this decade and beyond. While jail population has dropped through the late spring and summer months in 2000, its as yet undetermined if the decreases can be expected to continue. Additionally, counties find themselves looking to future legislative action on felony DWI's to determine possible increases in use of local jail time sanctions.

Extending partnerships in jail operation to other counties is one of the strategies being examined, in addition to continued use of jail alternatives, such as Sentence To Service programming.

The Regional Corrections Board increased STS work crew sizes this year, which is believed to be one of the factors

responsible for decreasing jail population. In STS offenders work one community service crew day and receive one day off their jail term in return. The STS program is expected to contribute 30,600 individual STS hours to worthy community projects in year 2000.

Projects in Polk County in year 2000 have included treating playground equipment at the Win-E-Mac School, painting at the Polk County Fair Grounds, brushing projects for various Townships, and fire hall cleaning for the East Grand Forks Fire Department.

The jail-planning project will have a report to the Regional Corrections Board in October with recommendations for specific construction plans at that time. Polk County Board of Commissioners will decide on whether to move ahead with further planning on a building project at some point in the future after analyzing the cost potential for the counties.

— Susan Mills, director, Tri-County Community Corrections

Ash used in CSAH 13 overlay material

Ash generated in the incinerator at the Solid Waste Resource Recovery Plant in Fosston was used this summer as a part of the "asphalt" mix used to overlay 2.25 miles of CSAH 13.

State approval for the demonstration project had been granted this year after questions about design, environmental monitoring, base line sampling, and performance evaluation had been addressed. The Office of Environmental Assistance had provided a \$52,400 grant for testing for environmental concerns, while the Minnesota

Department of Transportation office in Bemidji conducted its own tests to determine the acceptable asphalt mix for use in road construction. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency had personnel on site to monitor the work. The Polk County Environmental Services office is obligated to monitor air and water quality and adjacent soils.

As part of the pilot project, too, 350 feet of road in the Polk County Landfill was also paved. It is to be evaluated in three years for its ability to be recycled.

In the overlay trial, ash was

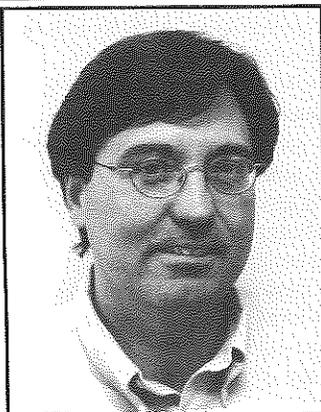
substituted for a portion of the gravel used in asphalt mix. The project was a part of the regular summer work plan of the Polk County Highway Department.

The mix used included 40 percent "old" ash and 20 percent "new" ash as a percent of total aggregate. The old ash had been generated prior to the installation of the up-front separation unit at the incinerator in 1996 and then deposited in the Polk County Landfill near Gently. The new ash used was generated after the up-front unit was put into use.

While the use of ash in road

construction is new to Minnesota, it has been used successfully in other parts of the country and in Europe for many years, according to Bill Wilson, manager of the Solid Waste Resource Recovery Plant. He notes that up to 80 percent of the ash generated at the incinerator could be used in road construction and that this could reduce costs for hauling, disposing and managing ash by about \$100,000 a year. The other 10 solid waste incinerator managers in Minnesota actively supported the Polk County test project.

Owned by Polk County, the incinerator became operational in August 1988. It receives and burns solid waste from five area counties — Beltrami, Clearwater, Mahanomen, Norman and Polk. The resulting ash is disposed of in the Polk County landfill facility near Gently. Using ash in road work is expected to extend the life of the lined waste cells at the landfill that are very expensive to build, while putting the waste ash material to a good and environmentally safe use.



Ron Dennison

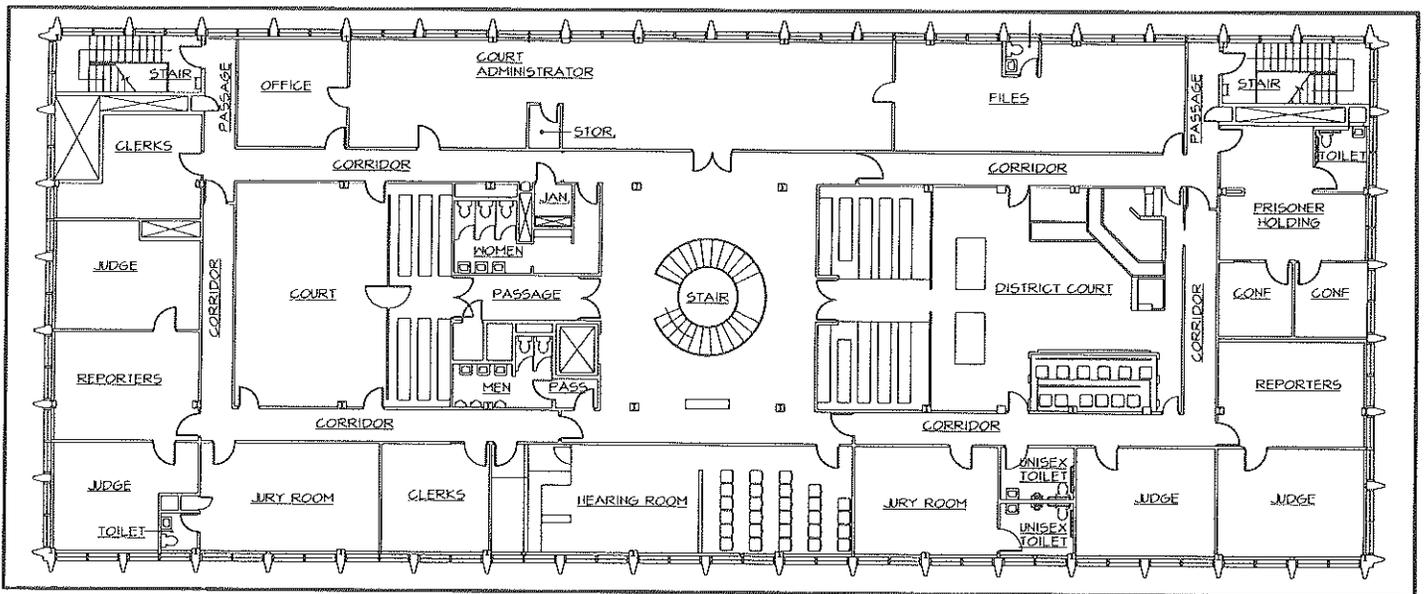
Dennison in accounting post

Ron Denison is now in his second year as accounting officer in the Auditor's Office.

A native of Crookston and a 1978 graduate of Central High School, Denison attended the University of Minnesota for two years before earning a degree in business administration with a major in finance from the University of North Dakota in 1990.

Before joining Polk County in January 1999, he had been controller at Northland Inn, Crookston, for four years and a financial analyst for Bremer Bank in Grand Forks for three years.

Denison and his wife, Janet (Wall), also a native of Crookston, have two children: Carla, 8, and Lilli, 5.



Space on 'courtroom floor' is being arranged to provide additional judge chambers and new hearing room

Remodeling of courtroom floor is underway

Remodeling of the courtroom floor of the courthouse is underway in anticipation of the arrival of a new 9th District Court Judge early in 2001.

The project will free-up space for the new judge, a court reporter and law clerk in addition to creating a large hearing room. The hearing

room will allow three cases to be heard at any one time, including two jury trials.

Space for the changes was made available by relocating the probation and parole services of Tri-County Community Corrections to the nearby Professional Building facility, and moving the law library.

Cameo Homes, Inc., Grand Forks, is doing the work on its low bid of \$252,809. The project is to be completed by mid-December. Widseth, Smith & Nolting, Crookston, is the project architect.

Judges John M. Roue and Richard C. Taylor have chambers in Crookston, while Judge

Michael J. Kraker has chambers in Mahanomen. They serve Polk, Norman and Mahanomen counties. When the new judge arrives, it is anticipated that Pennington and Red Lake counties will be included with Polk, Mahanomen and Norman in a five-county, five-judge work area.



Wanda Stroot

Era ends as Wanda Stroot gives up courthouse coffee shop

There isn't likely to be any more lasagna on the floor of the Polk County Courthouse coffee shop.

Wanda Stroot, operator of the lunchroom for the past 16 years, recently gave up the business to accept an increased role in the Riverview Hospital cafeteria.

"It was a lot of hard work and some long hours, but I do miss it... I miss the people. We had a lot of good times. It was a great place to work but times change," says Stroot, who with her husband, Bill, took over operation of the coffee shop in 1984. They worked together until 1990 (Bill died in 1992).

A decline in patronage brought on by increased restaurant competition in the area and by fewer employees in the courthouse were factors in the decision to close the shop, which had been operated continuously since the courthouse was built in 1962. The first operator was Marian Christopherson, who was followed by Ray Johnson, who ran the business for 13 years. Neva Wermager had it for several years before the Stroots took over.

"The past two years, I was working part-time at Riverview, too," Stroot says. "I'd leave the courthouse earlier on the days that I also worked at the hospital and would only have time to go home and change clothes before going over there. I was ready to scale down. I haven't had a vacation in 16 years, but I do miss the courthouse people."

The lasagna story? Wanda tells it like this: "One day, I had made lasagna. There must have been water on the bottom of the pan or something, so when I stepped away, it hit the floor upside down. The courthouse people were always pulling stuff on me, so Jason Huseby called upstairs to Greg Landa and told him that I had a special on lasagna that day... an order and a half for the price of one.

"Greg came right down and up to counter. As he did, I bent over with the big spatula that I used for burgers, and I flipped a piece onto a plate. Finally, he says, 'What the heck are you doing?' I said I was getting his order and a half of lasagna. I won't tell you what he told me."

Information from street cops, public helpful

Norman-Polk-Mahnomen Drug Task Force working to keep drugs out of hands of kids

For Scott Bixby and Randy Sondrol, job satisfaction comes when another drug dealer is taken off the street.

As senior Polk County Sheriff's Department deputies assigned to the Norman-Polk-Mahnomen County Drug Task Force, their main goal, they say, is "trying to keep drugs out of the hands of kids."

Toward that effort, they work irregular hours, sometimes around the clock. They carry pagers and are ready to respond at a moment's notice. Their schedules are arranged so that at least one of them is available.

Daytime hours are often spent checking out leads, doing paper work or in the courtroom. Nighttime is when drug dealers do most of their business. Because they are known in the communities where they live, Bixby and Sondrol seldom are able to work under cover and instead work closely with patrol officers and confidential informants. A patrol officer can notice a lot, they say, noting that traffic stops account for the beginning of many of the drug cases. Tips from the public are always useful and informative, too.

Quick response required

"When a case starts, you have to be able to respond quickly," Sondrol says, noting that "fresh" evidence and statements build the best case for the court proceedings that will follow.

The multi-jurisdictional task force operates on federal funds that are passed down to local law enforcement units in Minnesota through the Department of Public Safety. Polk County, with Capt. Karl Erickson as the administrator, is the fiscal agent for the \$70,000 in grant funding that comes to the three counties. Those counties along with three cities — Crookston, East Grand Forks and Ada — provide another \$24,000 in funding along with additional manpower when it is required for a special action.

Supplemental funding is generated from the sale of properties seized from those convicted of drug crimes. "I enjoy the idea of knowing the property and vehicles seized will be sold to supplement the budget of the Drug Task Force in ongoing narcotics investigations," Bixby says. In the past two years, the task force has acquired one farmsteads, two houses, a number of cars, and a significant amount of cash.

Sale of seized property supports effort

Without this money to supplement task force funding, the unit would run out of money long before the year ends. "But, we've never had to cease operations or go to the counties for additional help because of a lack of funds," Polk County Attorney Wayne Swanson says. "I've been extremely pleased with their work and so has the State of Minnesota. They are highly respected narcotics officers, who put a lot of effort into their cases."

The task force regularly has from 50 to 70 open cases. Through the first six months of this year, 24 persons were arrested on drug charges. Many more are being investigated,

including some, according to Bixby and Sondrol, who might never be suspected by the general public.

Drug arrests often result in a reduction of other crimes as well, they say, citing statistics that indicate that a "junkie" might commit up to 300 crimes a year just to support a habit. "We have solved many other cases by making a drug arrest," Sondrol says.

Meth labs an area problem

Methamphetamine, or "meth" labs have become a growing concern in northwestern Minnesota as well as around the country, Bixby and Sondrol say. Known as "crank," the poor man's cocaine, it can be manufactured from household items readily available in many stores. Store owners, they say, should be alerted if the same people come in to buy large quantities of items such as common cold pills (ephedrine or pseudo ephedrine), alcohol (isopropyl or rubbing alcohol), engine starter (ether), drain cleaner (sulfuric acid), coffee filters, table salt, lithium batteries, propane (anhydrous ammonia), lye, matches (red phosphorus), Pyrex dishes or muriatic acid.

Four meth labs have been seized in the area in just the last two years. While the manufacturing process creates a highly explosive situation, the clean up of meth sites presents a problem, too, because of the highly toxic residues that are left behind.

A native of the Walker, Minn., area, Bixby has been in law enforcement for 12 years. After graduating from the Hibbing Community College Police Academy, he spent two years at Macon, Ga., where he was involved in literally hundreds of drug cases. He's been a Polk County deputy since 1990 and has worked in narcotics fulltime for the past four years.

Sondrol, a native of Buxton, N.D., and a graduate of Climax High School, attended Northland Community College, Thief River Falls, before also graduating from the Hibbing CC Police Academy. He worked as a patrol deputy in Grand Forks County before coming to Polk County in 1994. He also has worked fulltime in narcotics for four years.

Public education part of job

Beyond their regular duties, the two men have made education a significant part of their jobs. They make presentations at schools, before service clubs and community organizations, while always doing whatever they can to educate the public.

"We've had very good results from the task force... results that certainly could not have been obtained otherwise," Sheriff Doug Qualley says. "No one department could afford to operate a task force; it has to be multi-jurisdictional to work in rural Minnesota. Through the task force, we can all share information and be much more efficient. And there is so much to do... we could easily justify the need to double the size of the task force."