

# SUPERIOR DAYS

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wildlife and parks, complimented Fred Strand, vice chairman for Bayfield County, on his colorful Tabasco tie.

Evers gushed about the Superior Waffles, a business he visited during a trip to Superior in November, in his speech.

## 8:30 a.m. Department of Natural Resources

A trio of delegates sat down with an equal number of administrators from the DNR. Deputy Director Sarah Barry has been coming to Superior Days for 14 years, initially as a staffer for Sen. Bob Jauch.

"I've always thought it was one of the premier citizen lobbying efforts. There's always that disconnect feeling from the Northland to Madison and I think it's great, even right now, with everything that has been happening, you've been able to come down and advocate," Barry said.

One of the top issues discussed was chronic wasting disease, which was first reported in Wisconsin on Feb. 28, 2002.

"At the time that CWD was found here, it was the first time it was detected east of the Mississippi River ... I remember that day well," Ryan said.

Since it was detected 20 years ago, CWD-affected deer have been found in 60 Wisconsin counties. The fatal brain disease has been detected in wild deer in 37 counties. A block of seven northern counties, including Douglas, remain CWD-free.

Douglas County Board Chairman Mark Liebaert, Bayfield County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison and Strand discussed options to keep those counties free of the deadly disease: more research, additional requirements for deer farms and the possible development of a rapid test for CWD.

A trio of bills are currently moving through the Senate (SB748, 749 and 750), along with a trio of companion bills in the Assembly (AB 771, 772 and 773), that would provide more funding for CWD research.

The delegates also requested a change to smaller deer hunting zones, so the numbers of licenses issued would be better tailored to the number of deer in each area.



Photos by Maria Lockwood / Superior Telegram

Department of Natural Resources Deputy Director Sarah Barry, from left, and administrators Tami Ryan and Keith Warnke with the division of fish, wildlife and parks listen to Douglas County Administrator Mark Liebaert during Superior Days in Madison on Tuesday.



Department of Transportation Secretary Craig Thompson, second from right, speaks to Superior Days delegates, from left, Douglas County supervisors Sam Pomush and Sue Hendrickson, Douglas County Board Chairman Mark Liebaert and Superior Mayor Jim Paine on Tuesday, in Madison.

## 9:45 a.m. Department of Health Services

Reciprocity in medical licensing requirements between Minnesota and Wisconsin was discussed with Timberlake.

The need to spend additional time and money to hold a Wisconsin license and the lower Medicaid reimbursement rate in Wisconsin mean many Minnesota providers are choosing not to get licensed in Wisconsin, according to Douglas County Deputy Director of Health and Human Services Dave Longsdorf.

He said that has led to the loss of access to detoxification services in Minnesota. Now, instead of traveling 10 miles to a detoxification center in Duluth, those in need of services must travel 140 miles to Eau Claire.

The wait time for a Wisconsin license is also a barrier to health care access in Douglas County. Kim Pearson, administrator of Essentia Health-St. Mary's in Superior, said the lack of a Wisconsin license keeps many Essentia specialists from offering services in Superior.

"A pulmonologist who grew up out in Douglas County — I was in 4-H with him — for a year he tried to get his Wisconsin license so that he could offer pulmonary function tests at the hospital that he drove by to work every day. And it took a year for him to get his Wisconsin license," Pearson said.

An Essentia therapist who was hired in August is still waiting for her Wisconsin license, she said, although the nurse

is able to practice in Minnesota. Nurses have the same union, same benefits in both states.

"They want to come over to Superior," Pearson said. "But we have to be able to get them a license so they can come over."

The Superior hospital had to use two traveling nurses last year, at a cost of \$140,000. There were nurses in Duluth willing to do the work, Pearson said, but they couldn't because of licensing.

Timberlake encouraged the delegates to discuss streamlining licensing with the Department of Safety and Professional Services as well as legislators. She appreciated the real-life examples and information delegates provided that exposed gaps in the system, and stressed the importance of sharing them with policymakers.

"You just never know when the seed that you're going to plant is going to take root in some really important ways," Timberlake said.

## 1:45 p.m. Department of Workforce Development

A pilot program that would reimburse student loan debt for University of Wisconsin-Superior graduates who continue to live and work in Douglas County was discussed with Department of Workforce Development Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek. The secretary appeared virtually, having gotten stuck in Milwaukee due to an overnight ice storm.

The UWS pilot program

would not qualify for federal funding, Pechacek said, but she directed Superior Days delegates to look at a grant request from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire that netted the institution \$9.4 million in federal funding to alleviate workforce shortages in a 16-county area. The program includes post-graduate housing, community connections and a Mayo Clinic apprenticeship program.

Retaining graduates to bolster the local workforce is a good objective, the secretary said. Incentives that could get graduates to stay in the area that would be eligible for grant funding included housing, transportation and curriculum, she told the delegates.

## 2 p.m. Department of Transportation

Department of Transportation Secretary Craig Thompson told delegates that in order to qualify for federal Infrastructure Bill funding in 2022, projects would have to be ready to go. More complicated projects could be considered for funding in 2023 and beyond. The bill will bolster transportation funding over the next five years, with a \$225 million pot set aside specifically for bridges.

"Is a viaduct a bridge? We have eight of those," said City Councilor Jenny Van Sickle, who gave a presentation on the new construction and community investment that's taken place along the reconstructed section



Department of Health Services Secretary designee Karen Timberlake, left, exchanges cards with Dave Longsdorf, Douglas County deputy director of health and human services, during a Superior Days meeting in Madison on Tuesday.

of Tower Avenue.

Abeles-Allison asked if there was a way to stockpile temporary bridges for the region that can be readily assembled and allow traffic to resume during the 30-180 days it takes to replace a bridge.

"We've had two 500-year floods in the past five years and that has a severe impact," Abeles-Allison said, and sometimes it takes out bridges.

## 3 p.m. Gov. Tony Evers

Evers came in through a hotel side entrance and stopped at the bottom of the grand staircase to remove his coat and don his "I'm a Superior Lover" button. Recapping highlights from his state of the state address, the governor discussed the state's record-low unemployment rate of 2.3% and high surplus of \$3.8 billion in a short speech.

"Going forward, we have a lot of needs in the state," Evers said, and they would do what they can to get money into people's pockets and address those needs.

One initiative the governor touched on was an additional \$110 million in funding for schools statewide. In his state of the state address, he announced a "Get Kids Ahead" initiative that will provide \$15 million to support school-based mental health services for K-12 schools. If all the school districts in Douglas County opted in, he said, it would bring more than \$150,000 to the area to support mental health services for students.

Evers also said the UW-System would be granted \$5 million for mental health services and \$25 million to keep tuition frozen "so students have one less thing to worry about."

He spoke of investments that have been made to Wisconsin businesses and the continuing need to improve state roads and broadband access.

"I'm glad to see Superior Days back in Madison for the 37th year. Unfortunately, you have a bunch of snow back home and you've

got to worry about how to get there and what's happening back home," Evers said. "Thank you for being here today. It's an honor to come and visit again and we'll do it next year again."

## 3:30 p.m. Department of Administration and Public Service Commission

Throughout the day, broadband access was discussed with the Department of Revenue, Department of Health Services and lastly, with the DOA.

"Almost every other secretary we have met here today has brought up something related to connecting people via the internet. It is the most important thing we can do for every aspect of social, economic, political life within the state," Superior Mayor Jim Paine said.

It is not just a rural problem, he stressed. Many people are unable to access reliable internet with adequate speeds in urban areas as well. Part of the issue is that mapping of internet coverage, which is done at the federal level, overstates the amount of area covered and understates the needs, according to Kristy Nieto, administrator of the Public Service Commission's division of digital access, consumer and environmental affairs.

"The more you can do for us and help us get access to more money, we will change the way the internet is delivered in Wisconsin and our model, I think, will be copied by almost every city in the state," Superior Mayor Jim Paine said, referring to the city's Connect Superior proposal.

The day ended with a dinner buffet and reception in the Madison Ballroom. Leaders planned to "storm the Capitol," as Paine put it, Wednesday morning to lobby for three issues that are unique to the area. They aren't new issues, but the group plans to continue to press for them.

"If you don't ask, they don't know and you don't get what you need," Strand said.

Jed has been bringing readers to places all over Douglas County as the photographer for the Superior Telegram for the past 21 years. He works along with a talented team of reporters to visually tell the stories of people all over the Northland. He enjoys exploring nature for an outdoors photo and especially shooting the dedicated athletes at local high schools and colleges on the courts, fields and run. He loves spending his free time with his two sons, Henry and Oscar. He also very much enjoys volunteering with the Spartan Spin, Superior High School's newspaper class.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

"I want our readers to see themselves in the pages and online of the Superior Telegram, their neighbors, family and friends. The big events and small moments. Both good and bad. Tomorrow's history is happening now and I'm trying my best to capture that for our readers."

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