

GUEST COLUMN

Special session can happen

By Julie Underwood and Heather DuBois Bourenane

Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools

If we want to, we can make positive change for our Wisconsin students – and we can make it happen within 24 hours. Let's get it done.

In mid-September, an extraordinary thing happened. A bill, sponsored by the Speaker of the Assembly, Robin Vos, was introduced and scheduled for a committee hearing within 24 hours. After the hearing, in less than a week's time, the bill was approved by an executive committee, scheduled for a vote on the Assembly Floor and then approved by the full Assembly. This bill, for some reason, was pushed through with lightning speed. It was incredible and an example of what is possible.

The bill deals with civics education in schools, and on the one hand it can be argued that such a rushed process didn't leave much room for civics.

The public was given barely any notice, the "public" hearing then came across as a bit of a sham as citizens in Wisconsin had little or no time to weigh in with their thoughts, approval or concerns. Ultimately, it highlighted some concerning trends about how the people's business is currently being handled in the Capitol.

On the other hand, it made clear that things can and do get done, government can be fast and it brought to sharp relief the fact that when the legislature doesn't really want to get something done, even when it knows that it should, an entirely different process comes into play. That process is exemplified by the report of the Speaker's Blue Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding.

Four years ago, with no small degree of fanfare and with some level of taxpayer expense, it was announced that the Speaker would put together a commission that would travel the state to hear testimony from parents, the public, school board members, business leaders and education experts on what to do about the long-standing and obvious ills of Wisconsin's

education funding system.

The commission learned, or was reminded of the fact, that Wisconsin ranks near or at the bottom in state support for students with disabilities, it ranks dead last for supporting English language learners, unlike other states it does not have a coherent system to lift up children challenged by poverty and that under state law depending on the school district that you live in a student is worth more or less from a fiscal perspective than their neighbor.

In fact, one set of national experts that were invited to speak to the commission informed the group that at this point Wisconsin has such a hodge-podge of a funding system and that it is so unlike anything in any other state (not in a good way) that they had to put it in its own category.

To their credit, the bipartisan commission took that information, looked for serious solutions and produced a report that includes a number of impressive policy recommendations that would truly help students, parents, schools and communities.

The report continues to be something that many are proud of and it is commonly referenced as policy that could make an immediate difference. One of those solutions, restoring our commitment to funding special education to a minimum reimbursement level of 60%, is something we could do today, if we chose to invest in meeting the most pressing needs of our public schools.

The solutions are sitting there, ready to go. The funds to pay for the best versions of the solutions are also sitting there, ready to go. Within 24 hours, within a week, we could improve the lives of Wisconsin's kids. Let's get it done.

This guest column seeking a special session to fund special education for Wisconsin's public schools was presented by Dr. Julie Underwood, board chair, and Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Public Education Network, on behalf of the board of directors of the Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES).



Chris Mertes/File

Sun Prairie Lions Club members Sherry and Pat Parrish staffed the Salvation Army Red Kettle inside the foyer at Woodmans Market on South Grand Avenue in Sun Prairie in 2020. The Parrishes will be among those staffing the Red Kettles for the Sun Prairie Lions in December at the Sun Prairie Metro Market, 2538 Ironwood Drive.

ET CETERA

Sun Prairie Lions ready to ring bells in December

By Chris Mertes

spedit@hngnews.com



Chris Mertes

Periodically through the years, the Sun Prairie Lions Club has participated in Salvation Army Bell Ringing, and this year is no exception.

Last year, available slots filled up pretty quickly and I was left out in the cold – although I did brave the weather and contribute when I stopped by Woodmans Market when the Lions were staffing the Salvation Army Red Kettle.

This year, we'll be ringing bells at the Metro Market, located at 2538 Ironwood Drive, on Saturdays in December this year.

On Dec. 4, our bell ringers will be Mike Healy and Larry Lawrence from 10 a.m.-noon; and Pat and Sherry Parrish from 12-2 p.m. CMS will be matching Red Kettle donations on that day.

On Saturday, Dec. 11, Randy Harrison and Clyde Howell will ring bells from 8-10 a.m., followed by yours truly with Clyde Howell from 12-2 p.m. One Community Bank is matching donations that day.

As of press time, our Saturday, Dec. 18 8-10 a.m. time slot remains to be filled, but fear not, Lions fans – our club will come through (I realize, of course, this means that if nobody steps up, I will be committed again on that day).

As we all know, The Red Kettle Christmas Campaign enables The Salvation Army to provide food, toys and clothing to more than 6 million people during the Christmas season and helps more than 34

million Americans recovering from all kinds of personal disasters nationwide.

In 2004, the campaign raised over \$100 million in communities nationwide, with the nickels, dimes, quarters and dollars all remaining in the towns where the money was deposited into the kettles. The funds raised help support many of the 37 million people in poverty who turn to the Salvation Army for food and toys at Christmas, utility and homeless assistance, senior and child care, drug abuse treatment and many other social service needs.

The Red Kettle campaign first started in San Francisco in 1891. It has traditionally been the Salvation Army's most prominent fund-raiser, and usually includes some kind of a high-profile launch in the Madison area. One recent launch was at the Metro Market where our Sun Prairie Lions will be ringing bells in December.

Each year since 2001, VolunteerFIRST has teamed up with many Salvation Army Corps to make it possible for volunteers to register online for up to 1 million Red Kettle 'shifts' across the country.

That may be true, but I don't think the ringbells.org website was ready for me to search. During one recent search, the website told me there were no opportunities to volunteer in the 53590 ZIP Code, which I know is not true – there will be plenty of opportunities to

volunteer to ring bells. In fact, my suggestion would be to try the website <https://www.registertertoring.com/> and make your selection through the Salvation Army website if you want to ring bells this holiday season.

Now, you have plenty of warning – about a month. Clear those calendars, phone the neighbors, wake the kids and bring them to Metro Market on any or all of our Lions bell-ringing days (of course, I'm partial to my shift) to stuff the money into the Red Kettle.

I love letting little kids use the paint stirrers to stuff the paper \$10, \$5 and even \$1 bills down into the kettles – it makes them feel like they are doing something to help. Many of them drop quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies into the kettle, too – and every little bit helps.

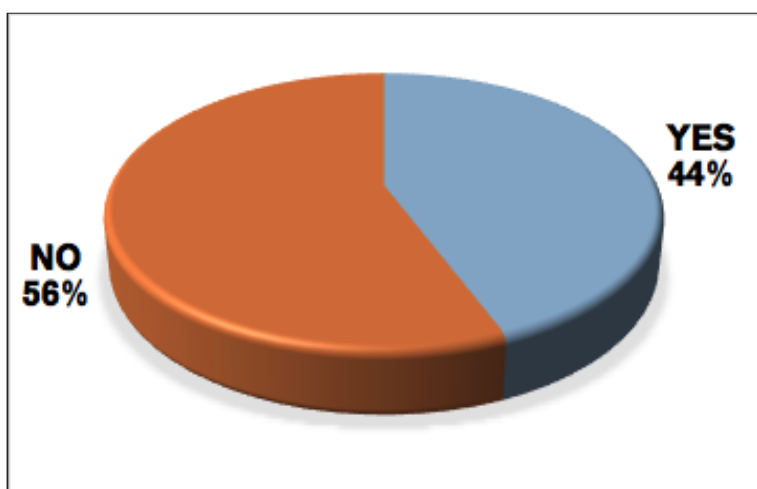
And, as always, Lion Clyde and I (as well as our fellow Lions) expect all of our adult Metro Market Red Kettle patrons to be as generous as possible. When Lion Clyde and I staff the kettle, there may even be a little Christmas music in the background designed to put shoppers in the mood for loosening their wallets for contributions to the Red Kettle Campaign.

It's a great way for the Sun Prairie community to know that as Sun Prairie Lions, We Serve, and for those Salvation Army Red Kettles to be filled in time for a joyous holiday season!

Et Cetera is a column of personal opinion and experience by the managing editor of the Sun Prairie Star; opinions expressed are his own.

ONLINE POLL

Do you agree with Congress passing a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure plan?



Check sunpraiestar.com for this week's poll question and pick up the **Friday, November 19** issue for poll results!

SUN PRAIRIE STAR

Published every Tuesday and Friday by Adams Publishing Group.

USPS #519-320. Periodicals postage paid at Sun Prairie, WI.

Annual postal delivered subscription rate \$65.

Certain editions of the Sun Prairie Star will be considered premium day editions and incur additional charges. These additional charges will change the paid-through date of your subscription.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Circulation, PO Box 888, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538.

Chris Mertes, Managing Editor
(608) 478-2521
spedit@hngnews.com

Jennifer Fetterly, Associate Editor
(608) 729-4699
jfetterly@hngnews.com

Ryan Gregory, Sports Editor
(608) 478-2520
spsports@hngnews.com

Missy Feiler,
General Manager/Revenue Director
mfeiler@hngnews.com

Scott Peterson, Group Editor
scottp@wdtimes.com

TO SUBSCRIBE
(608) 764-0299
circulation@hngnews.com

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
(608) 478-2509
classifieds@hngnews.com

DISPLAY ADVERTISING
(608) 478-2517
mfeiler@hngnews.com

**804 LIBERTY BLVD., SUITE 201
SUN PRAIRIE, WI 53590
(608) 837-2521
sunpraiestar.com**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Careful consideration needed for direction city is headed

Sun Prairie has always been known as the fastest growing small city in Wisconsin. It appears that it has now become the fastest growing medium-sized city in Wisconsin and the second largest city in Dane County after Madison.

What this growth has apparently accomplished is rush hour traffic, an increase in the number and severity of police, fire and EMS calls, multi-story housing complexes, a semipro football stadium, a huge new

west side school complex with inevitable planning for more schools, more roads, more strip malls and a huge increase in the need for city services.

In one of last week's issues of the Sun Prairie Star, Police Chief Mike Steffes reported that his department is now short of patrol officers and expects the shortage to be worse. As an aside, the Sun Prairie Police Department has hired a former police inspector from Milwaukee. It would behoove SPPD management to carefully listen to the inspector's advice.

I'm told that other city departments are short of help, as is the Sun Prairie Area School District.

It appears to me that city leadership is pushing unsustainable growth that will have to be backed up by a big increase in city services that may or may not be available. And – more rads, more equipment, snow plows, sidewalks (a budget item with funds that could be diverted elsewhere but I digress), a huge increase in social services – and on we go.

We had better give some careful consideration to the direction we are headed as a city.

Time is running short.

**Mike Leahan
Sun Prairie**