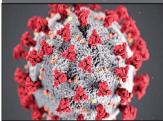


Serving the Ripon community since 1864

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Hospitals near capacity ahead of Christmas, p. 3



Murray Park/Quest hosts holiday concert, p. 11



RC men rise to the challenge, defeats Bethany, p. 16



THE J.M. SMUCKER Co. announced last week that it plans to close its Ripon facility at 1050 Stanton St. in 2022. The plant employs 92 people. Jonathan Bailey photo

By Joe Schulz

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A little more than a decade ago, Ripon's J.M. Smucker Co. plant was spared when the company decided to cut roughly 700 personnel and shutter almost 20% of its plants nationwide.

This time around, it wasn't quite so lucky as the facility at 1050 Stanton St. is set to be shuttered in 2022.

The J.M. Smucker Co. announced last week Wednesday that it intends to close and pursue the sale of its Ripon manufacturing facility.

The announcement came in a corporate press release, which said the decision was made "to further optimize operations for the consumer foods business."

While the release mentioned the plan to close the Ripon plant, it primarily served as an announcement that the company intended to sell

its natural and organic beverage and grains businesses to Nexus Capital Management LP.

"This transaction supports our strategy to direct investments and resources toward core brands positioned for growth," said Tina Floyd, senior vice president and general manager of Consumer

Foods for The J.M. Smucker Co.

In a written statement, J.M. Smucker Co. Corporate Communications Manager Frank Cirillo described the decision as "difficult," but said it was made to "optimize operations."

See CLOSE/back page

Schommer to retire in June after 25 years as Ripon's city clerk

Ripon will use private firm to help search for new clerk

By Joe Schulz

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When Ann Schommer started her career with the city of Ripon as deputy clerk in October 1996, she experienced a "baptism by fire."

She had just left an accounting job in the private sector and was thrust into running a presidential election in her second month on the job, determining tax bills and many other tasks that were completely foreign to her.

If not for the help of the Fond du Lac County clerk and treasurer offices, Schommer isn't sure that she would have made it that first year.

"I was on the phone with them constantly trying to arrange for the election and learning what I had to





CITY CLERK ANN Schommer prepares to close the door on her time in municipal government. *Joe Schulz photo*

do," she recalled. "I'd speak with the people in the finance department, who showed me the bits and pieces of what went into making the mill rate."

Now, Schommer has 25 years of experience under her belt, and has become someone others in City Hall look to for advice about elections and various other city operations.

After diligently serving the city of Ripon and its residents for more than two decades, Schom-

mer announced last week that she will retire from her position in June 2022.

"I am very grateful to the city for all the opportunities it gave me and for basically welcoming me, who had no clue what I was doing [at first]; it was patient with me," Schommer said. "The council and the city administrators didn't hesitate to approve any educational opportunities that I wanted."

See RETIRE/back page

Darkness will be outshined by the brightest light

By the Rev. Canon Ezgi S. Perkins, St. Peter's Episcopal Church rector

We live in times where empathy is a rare commodity.

I am sure most of us have heard someone in our lives at one point who cried out: "You just don't understand. You don't know what I am going through!"



Isn't that just a true statement?

Don't we sometimes feel that when we are confronted with a world that does not seem to care about our suffering and that sometimes seems to deal us a bad hand?

Christmas is a time where the secular world screams out themes of goodwill, joy and peace from the rooftops.

Many people act as if the



Rev. Canon Ezgi S. Perkins

only way to feel such elevated goodness is to fill our lives with material things and give expensive gifts to others in order to feel some type of worth in life.

Goodwill towards all people, and peace on Earth ... Now go buy more stuff!

No wonder we believe no one cares about what we are going through.

In Christmas, when we find

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CLOSE/City working with Envision FdL and WEDC

"Any decision that impacts our employees is challenging and only made after careful consideration," Cirillo said. "We are committed to supporting our employees through this transition process, which we anticipate culminating in late 2022."

The J.M. Smucker Co. bought out the Ripon-based R-Line Foods in 1987. At one time, R-Line Foods was the nation's leader in the production of miniature fruit preserves.

The Ripon manufacturing facility currently employs 92 people, according to Cirillo.

He noted Ripon employees will be eligible to explore and apply for other open positions in the company.

"For those who choose not to, or are unable to find another role, our comprehensive severance and outplacement benefits, designed to support employees and their families, will be provided," he added.

Any time a company makes

the decision to shutter a plant, it impacts the community, according to Envision Greater Fond du Lac Vice President of Economic Development Jim Cleveland.

"The local community sees a loss to the employment base, as well as a loss to services such as sewer, water and electric," Cleveland said. "The first concern will be for the employees and providing the needed resources for them."

Cleveland said Envision Greater Fond du Lac will work closely with the J.M. Smucker Co. to provide services and link employees to local organizations, and regional services, such as Fox Valley Workforce Development, in order to minimize the disruption to families.

Ripon Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jason Mansmith added that a facility bringing 92 jobs to Ripon has a significant impact on the local economy.

"That breeds economic development because people are com-



RIPON'S J.M. SMUCKER Co. facility is set to close in late 2022.

Jonathan Bailey photo

ing into the community each day
— whether they live here or they
commute here, they're still doing
business in Ripon," Mansmith said.
"It definitely has an impact."

Smucker's decision may help other local employers who are struggling to find workers, the chamber director added.

"We hope to be able to retain some of those employees that way as well," Mansmith said.

Meanwhile, City Administrator Adam Sonntag noted the city is trying to schedule a meeting with local and corporate Smucker's officials to discuss the future of the facility

"Our thoughts and concerns are with our local individuals who work there getting through the holidays," Sonntag said. "It's a difficult time to learn this type of stuff happening with your job. You never like to see this happen to local people and their families, but this is a very difficult time for it to happen."

In early January, the city intends to work with J.M. Smucker Co., Envision Greater Fond du Lac and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. (WEDC) to create a plan for the facility, Sonntag noted

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Cleveland added that it's important to begin marketing the Stanton Street facility as soon as possible to minimize the impact of the closure on the community.

"We have access to the statewide platform via WEDC to upload information on the facility and distribute to a wide network of brokers and site selectors," he said. "At this point, it is too early to comment or speculate on who may be interested in this real estate."

Sonntag added that the city hopes to keep the plant functional long enough to give the city and its partners time to create a plan for the property.

"This isn't a case where the doors were locked right away; this provides time next year to work with everybody to form the best plan possible," he said. "The last thing the city wants to see is for the plant to sit vacant for any long period of time."

RETIRE/Clerk's goal was always 'running a fair election' continued from page 1

During her tenure with the city, Schommer has seen many different common councils, mayors and city administrators.

Through it all, she served as a steady hand in local government and someone others could rely on.

"Ann was awesome in her duties for the city, and she was very passionate about her job, which is rare nowadays," former mayor Gary Will said. "She's done it for a long time, and I was fortunate to work with her for 10 years.

"I never questioned or worried about anything related to elections because she was top notch and always kept up on the laws changing year after year. If there were any questions we had — as mayor, council or staff — she knew the answers."

The Common Council last week Tuesday unanimously approved hiring consulting firm GovHR to conduct recruitment services to assist with filling the position, which will cost the city \$6,000.

"We understand the importance of what Ann, our city clerk, does," Ald. Jolene Schatzinger said. "I'm not sure everybody in the city always understands that importance because Ann's name isn't in the headlines."

During the meeting, City Administrator Adam Sonntag said the city couldn't afford to keep the clerk position vacant if it had no qualified applicants, especially with spring and fall elections slated for 2022.

Without a recruitment firm, he noted the city would likely have a hard time finding qualified candidates.

"The position of a city clerk is incredibly important as we've seen the past couple years with elections," Sonntag said after the meeting.

He praised Schommer for giving the city six-months notice, which gives officials time to find her replacement.

"You can't replicate Ann's understanding and professionalism," Sonntag said. "She is, through and through, a public servant."

Serving the public

Schommer initially was attract-



CITY CLERK ANN Schommer smiles from her desk in City Hall. She will retire in June.

Joe Schulz photo

ed to a position in local government because she's always been interested in politics, but never felt the urge to run for office.

When she applied, it wasn't for the deputy clerk position. It was for an account clerk position.

However, the city administrator at the time liked Schommer so much he offered her the deputy clerk position after hiring someone else for the account clerk position.

Since starting with the city in 1996 as deputy clerk, Schommer's role has evolved.

The city administrator and deputy clerk both used to be responsible for managing elections.

In 2010, the city shifted responsibilities and created the position of city clerk, which replaced the deputy clerk position.

As city clerk, Schommer is responsible for election management; licensing for alcohol, operator licenses, parking permits and more; helping the city assessor get appointments for property value appeals; taking minutes during Common Council meetings; as well as managing the city's accounts payable.

Schommer's favorite and least favorite aspects of the job are the same: People.

"You meet some of the most fantastic people and then there's others that you have to prepare yourself for," she said.

Through the years, Schommer has worked with a variety of city administrators, each with a different management style.

"I enjoyed working for all of them," Schommer said. "It's a two-way street because they're learning from you, and you're learning from them."

Managing elections

One of the aspects of Schommer's job that has constantly evolved is the management of elections as regulations are constantly changing and technology continues to evolve.

She is responsible for collecting paperwork from candidates for municipal offices, training election inspectors, scheduling times for inspectors to go to senior living facilities, scheduling inspectors on election day, conducting maintenance on the city's voting machines, maintaining registered voter lists, entering information into poll books and more.

"Throughout the year, there's maintenance to do," Schommer said. "Just elections have almost become a full-time job itself."

When she started in 1996, election machines used punch cards that residents would use a stylus with to punch holes for their selected candidates.

After the election, those cards had to be delivered to the Fond du Lac County clerk's office, where officials would run them through a card reader.

"We didn't know who won until we went to the county, and then you had to wait in line because all of the other municipalities were bringing ballots in," Schommer recalled. "I remember that very first election, and we were still sitting in the Fond du Lac County office after midnight, and I thought,

'What did I get myself into?'"

The city received new machines, which got results right away, and the laws continued to change.

"It's gotten more complicated, but it's worth it," Schommer said of keeping up with election laws.

Although the city no longer has to send someone physically to the Fond du Lac County offices, there's still plenty Schommer has to do on election day.

"It's gotten better, but it can still get pretty hectic," she said, noting clerks are responsible for ensuring no write-ins are missed, ensuring the city has the same number of ballots as people who voted and answering questions from voters.

After the 2020 presidential election, municipal clerks across the country became scapegoats of an alleged conspiracy theory that the election was stolen.

When confronted with conspiracy theories from city residents, Schommer tries to explain the city's process and illustrate how elections are run fairly.

"At the end of my explanation, you can tell by the expression on people's faces that they're going to believe what they're going to believe," she said.

"At the end of our conversation, I basically look at them and say, 'Why don't you come to the training for election inspectors? And then why don't you work the election? Then you can go through the whole process.' They're not interested. They're interested in just what they believe."

Despite the conspiracies, Schommer's role doesn't change.

No matter who's on the ballot for president or alderman, her only goal on election day is "just running a fair election."

Ready for retirement

Schommer's decision to retire stems from a health scare she suffered this past spring.

"I ended up in the hospital for about four days and the doctor said what brought it on was stress," she said. "Not stress in the moment, but stress that's been building."

At first, Schommer laughed it off because "everybody has stress in their lives."

But, after discussing further with her doctor, friends and family, as well as looking at the future political climate, Schommer decided to choose to put her health first.

She plans to retire in June because it will, hopefully, give her time to get through the spring election and ensure her replacement is ready for the fall mid-term election.

In retirement, Schommer plans to take the summer off to spend more time with friends and family.

"I have a niece in West Bend that has three little kids, so I told her, 'auntie Ann will be available if you need her,'" she said. "In the fall, if I get real antsy, I'll either volunteer somewhere or find something part-time to keep busy."

