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BURLINGTON MAYOR TO SEEK LAST TERM

One more time

Mayor Hefty says she's running for re-election, and that'll be it

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BURLINGTON — Mayor Jeannie Hefty is running for re-election, and she says it will be her last hurrah in local politics.

Hefty, who is currently serving

Candidate deadline

Anyone seeking to become a candidate in the spring 2022 municipal elections has until Jan. 4 to file nominating petitions. Check with your local municipality or school district for details.

her seventh term as mayor, has filed the paperwork as a candidate for re-election in the April municipal elections.

The longtime community

leader says if she is re-elected, it will be her final term.

In an email, Hefty wrote that she is committed to resolving the issue of Echo Lake, where an

aging dam means that the city must either invest in upgrades or remove the dam and drain the lake. Hefty wants to make the investment needed to preserve the dam.

Referring to the process of seeking re-election, she wrote, "I have pulled papers for running for the last time for mayor because my heart is (in) saving

Please see HEFTY, Page A3



ANNIE HEFTY
MARK FELDMANN, JOURNAL TIMES FILE PHOTO

Burlington Mayor Jeannie Hefty, currently in her seventh term, is seeking an eighth, which she says will be her last.

TOP 10 STORIES OF 2021



ADAM ROGAN, ADAM.ROGAN@JOURNALTIMES.COM

The pier south of Racine's beaches, shown here in August, is near where at least two of the five people who died in Lake Michigan in 2021 off Racine's beaches drowned.

AMBULANCES | FINAL PART OF SERIES

The calls keep coming

More older people means more demand, thus higher costs

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The Caledonia Fire Department, like nearly all publicly funded fire and rescue operations, is not allowed to refuse service to someone who calls the department. That's part of why call volume to senior care facilities has gone through the roof since 2018, Fire Chief Jeffrey Henningfeld said at a Dec. 6 Caledonia Village Board meeting.

In 2018, calls to the multi-building Parkview Senior-Living Community totaled 201. This year, through Dec. 15, it was 451.

Older people tend to have an increased need for emergency medical services, especially when they remain independent longer.

"It's not just Parkview. It's all of our senior living facilities," Henningfeld said. "It's not that we're complaining about it, it just is that way. We're trying to meet the needs of the community and the needs are increasing. There's a myriad of reasons why."

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Tragedy after tragedy

Five drown in 2021 in Lake Michigan

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RACINE — It was a rare year for drownings.

Five people died throughout summer and early fall 2021 in Lake Michigan off of Racine's shores: 10-year-old girl, a 17-year-old boy, a 14-year-old girl, a 40-year-old man and a 28-year-old man.

The Great Lakes Surf Rescue, which tracks deaths in the Great Lakes, reported 83 drownings in 2021 in all of the Great Lakes combined as of Sept. 19. There had been 38 drownings that year in Lake Michigan, which is consistently the deadliest of the five lakes.



Figueredo-Colon



Walker



Lantz



Singh

Drownings are even rarer in public waters like Lake Michigan without a compounding factor, such as an unrelated medical event preceding a drowning.

Never in the past four years prior to June has a drowning in Racine County been attributed to a rip current.



Limbert

But rip currents were a factor in at least the first three deaths, which occurred in June, according to the Racine County Medical Examiner's Office.

Officials have said it's practically impossible to be prepared

Please see DROWNINGS, Page A3

■ **Coming Sunday:** The Journal Times' top photos of 2021.

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CLASSIFIED	B6	LOTTERY	A2	RACINE COUNTY	A5	TV LISTING	A2, A7
COMICS	B7	OBITUARIES	A4	SERVICE DIRECTORY	B6	WEATHER	A8
COMMUNITY	B4	PUZZLE CORNER	B6	SPORTS	C1	WISCONSIN	A5



Calls

From A1

State's aging population

The Caledonia Fire Department answered 2,964 calls last year and answered approximately 3,170 calls this year. For the most part, responses to senior living facilities increased.

The Siena Retreat Center campus called for CFD assistance 50 times in 2020 and 82 times in 2021. Frontida's Willowgreen Home assisted living facility saw its calls climb from 49 in 2020 to 75 in 2021. The Woods of Caledonia retirement community decreased its number of calls from 107 to 80 in those same years.

More calls means more costs for the CFD, and thus more costs to taxpayers, especially when Medicare and Medicaid don't always pay enough to cover the costs of each individual call.

Henningsfeld said he fears the community's needs may not be met if the department loses staffing, and personnel wants to be able to continue to serve the community at its current staffing numbers.

Regardless of the numbers themselves, Wisconsin's population is aging fast, and the numbers of medical professionals in the state is not growing at the same rate.

According to a report from the Wisconsin Hospitals Association: "From 2017 to 2032, the U.S. population under age 18 is projected to grow by only 3.5%, while the population aged 65 and over is projected to grow by 48%, and the population aged 75 and older is projected to grow by a staggering 75.3%."

These trends will likely hold true in Wisconsin. According to state data, as of 2015, more than one-fifth of the populations of all but nine of Wisconsin's counties were age 60 and older, and no county's populations was more than two-fifths comprised of those 60 and over. By 2030, projections show that every Wisconsin county's population is to be at least 20% people who are 60 and older, and 10 counties (all of them in central or northern Wisconsin) are to have 40% of their populations age 60 or older.

Racine, Mount Pleasant and Sturtevant

Cynthia White, division chief of professional standards, health and safety for the Racine Fire Department, said the department hasn't seen anything in senior living responses as significant as Caledonia, but perhaps some slight increases.

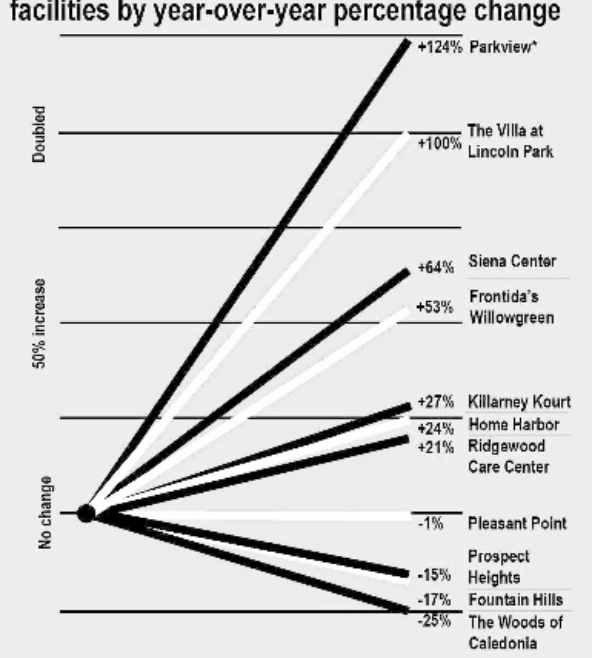
In 2020, calls to Home Harbor were 49 and in 2021 to date, they were 61. Calls to Prospect Heights Community Living decreased from 26 in 2020 to 22 in 2021. Calls to The Villa at Lincoln Park doubled, from 53 to 106 during those same years.

She said the numbers may not entirely reflect seniors' need for medical attention or EMS, however, because in 2020, most senior living facilities were locked down and didn't allow visitors, including emergency personnel.

"We weren't at the facilities at all because they weren't allowing people there," White said. "We usually are going into some of their rooms. We didn't do that. We weren't going, they weren't calling. Calls just kind of ... everybody disappeared."

Randy Marvin, co-owner of Prospect Heights along with his wife, Elizabeth, said he and other Prospect staff members don't call EMS unless someone has a more serious condition.

EMS calls to Racine County senior living facilities by year-over-year percentage change



JOURNAL TIMES GRAPHIC

All data provided by the respective local fire and rescue departments. Percentage change is calculated based on 2020 call volume (or 2018 call volume for Parkview, marked by *) compared to 2021 call volume as of the second-to-last week of December 2021, when numbers were provided to The Journal Times.

Residents who need to go to prompt care will be transported via a private ambulance service. If an ambulance company is estimating a long wait time, staff will call another company. Then if no one can come, that's when EMS is called. Prospect staff also do their own transport.

Marvin said the residential facility can house up to 52 people, but the population is down to 46, which is a bit of a decrease from last year, and could contribute to there being fewer fire department calls.

"Our residents all have their own doctors, their own appointments. We keep them all in good health," Marvin said. "We don't have any major dramas where we can't take care of them ourselves. We've been here for 20 years and we know what we're doing here. We've got things down to a science."

Chief Robert Stedman of the South Shore Fire Department said EMS calls in total have actually been down compared to a year ago; they total 81.4% of the department's calls this year compared to 83% of the calls last year.

The total call volume has increased by 15% from 2020 to 2021 and the department that serves Mount Pleasant, Sturtevant and Elmwood Park receives about 68% more calls than Caledonia. He said a lot of department calls for senior citizens are to single-family homes, apartments and condominiums as well, not necessarily only senior living facilities.

Michael Wienke, a South Shore battalion chief, shift commander and EMS supervisor, said the department experienced an increase in call volumes from 2018-2021 as well, but the numbers appear to be linked to an increase in traffic, development, residential growth and population — not senior living centers specifically.

In 2020, the department had 4,613 responses to calls. In 2021, the department is on pace to respond to 5,305 calls.

Calls to Ridgewood Care Center went from 82 in 2020 to 99 in 2021. Across that same span: calls to Killarney Kourt retirement home increased from 73 to 93, Fountain Hills senior apartments calls decreased from 70 to 58, and Pleasant Point Senior Living calls held steady from 120 to 119 in those same years.

However, from 2019 to this year so far, Pleasant Point's total has more than tripled, from 39 to 119.

Jim Tarantino, founder and principal of Capri Communities, the company that operates Killarney Kourt, said the increase in EMS calls could be due to the fact the population is aging.

"It mainly has to do with their health condi-

tions and they're getting older," Tarantino said. "Their needs are higher."

His company has locations in the Madison area as well as southeastern Wisconsin and staff has reported situations where ambulances can't arrive for pickups for hours or will altogether refuse transport. Some senior living facilities have said private ambulances can't come until the next day. Some hospitals will refuse to admit patients.

Tarantino said he's gotten very low amounts of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (the CARES Act) money to help with the labor shortage and COVID-19-related expenses. His staff is getting burnt out too.

"We're really struggling from a financial standpoint because we don't have any support," Tarantino said. "I've contacted government officials and I have yet to see any material responses. The government, frankly, is turning its back on us. It's very disheartening."

West end

Wind Lake Volunteer Fire Company Fire Chief Justin Lyman said he, too, has felt an increase in the number of calls to senior facilities. He said he can't think of many reasons the department would refuse to take calls to such facilities. There's only a few small senior homes in the Town of Norway, he said, but the senior population is growing.

"We understand that different facilities offer different levels of medical care. When they run into a situation that is outside of their scope of practice, that's where we are able to step in as a resource," Lyman said in an email. "It certainly seems most of the construction recently, on the west end, has been senior based."

Kansasville Fire and Rescue Volunteer Fire Department Chief Ron Molnar said department calls to senior living facilities "haven't spiked or skyrocketed ... they might have a slight increase, but nothing astronomical."

The only senior living facility within Kansasville Fire and Rescue's district is Boland Hall, a residential building on the campus of the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Union Grove, located in the Town of Dover.

The department has one ambulance. If there's a second call at the same time the department is responding to a first call, it relies on mutual aid.

Over the past several years, the number of calls have remained steady, he said. This is true even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which he said didn't affect the data.

"It's not COVID-related, whatsoever," Molnar said. "People have chronic health conditions or are generally sick that need to go to the hospital."

Drownings

From A1

for a rip current since they can seemingly come out of nowhere.

"Riptides are very unpredictable," Racine County Sheriff Christopher Schmalzing said during a press conference June 22 following the first rash of tragedies.

From July 2017 through June 2021, there have been 14 drowning deaths in Racine County, according to a report of accidental drownings provided to The Journal Times in June by the Racine County Medical Examiner's Office. None of the other 11 drowning deaths in the past four years had been attributed to rip currents.

Eisha Figuereo-Colon and Yaadwinder Singh

Two youths struggled to stay afloat on the same day at adjacent Racine beaches, and after lifeguards were no longer on duty.

The Racine County Communications Center received numerous 911 calls around 6:30 p.m. on June 19, about a 10-year-old girl possibly drowning in Lake Michigan off Zoo Beach. Lifeguard shifts ended at 6 p.m.

At about 6:54 p.m. the child was located, removed from the water, and transported by rescue personnel to an area hospital. The girl, Eisha "Nahomey" Figuereo-Colon of Racine, died that day at the hospital.

She reportedly didn't know how to swim.

An obituary described her as "a very artistic young lady, she loved drawing, painting, music, and playing the keyboard."

Last week, in trying to make a happier holiday, the Racine Police Department, in partnership with the Blue Bear restaurant, surprised the immediate family members of Figuereo-Colon with gifts and a warm meal for the first Christmas since the loss of their sister and daughter.

Trying to save lives

In August, local teachers, the union for Racine firefighters and the Racine Founders Rotary Club teamed up, hoping to inspire safety in Racine's waters.

Using about \$10,000 in raised funds, 150 life preserver vests and 12 throw rings were placed at Racine's beaches.

They are held in brightly colored boxes, built by Greg Kiriaki and Joe Pascucci, teachers at Park High School.

"We just hope that people will use them," Brian Turczynski, a member of the Racine Fire Department's dive team, said of the new life preserver vests.

After the first drownings, Schmalzing repeatedly called on the city to extend lifeguard hours to increase safety on the beach, while also calling on community members to be more aware of the dangers of the water — especially to children.

The City of Racine's 2022 budget includes money to pay six more lifeguards on its beaches next summer. As such, for the first time in recent memory, Zoo Beach will be staffed by lifeguards rather than only adjacent North Beach.

Thomas J. Walker

Later in the summer, a 40-year-old man identified as Thomas J. Walker of Missouri died Aug. 22 after saving two children who were "in distress" in the water near the pier north of North Beach and Zoo Beach.

Walker entered the water to save the children, who were related to him. The children got out of the water thanks to his help, but he was unable to escape.

He was taken to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

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Aric Michael Lantz

On Oct. 6, someone walking along Pershing Park Drive found a body in the water.

Racine County Medical Examiner Michael Payne confirmed in October that freshwater drowning was the cause of death and foul play was not suspected.

The body was identified as that of Aric Michael Lantz, a 28-year-old man from Racine. Lantz had a young son, Carter Thomas Lantz.

He had been missing since Sept. 29, according to a Facebook post from a loved one, and the Racine Police Department first received a report of him being missing on Oct. 2. Initial reports said it appears Lantz's body had been in the water for several days before he was seen by the person walking along Pershing Park Drive.

Lily Limbert

The same day Singh was pronounced dead, Lake Michigan claimed another victim. A 14-year-old Milwaukee County girl was pulled from Lake Michigan at North Beach June 21 and was taken to Children's Hospital in Wauwatosa via Flight for Life for treatment. She died June 29.

She was identified as Lily Limbert of Greendale.

According to the Racine County Sheriff's Office, Limbert had been pulled by "a strong current ... into deeper water and into the rocks surrounding North Pier" preceding her death, marking the third death attributed to rip currents.

Hefty

From A1

the dam."

"It was not a hard decision to run again," she said, adding of the Echo Lake issue, "I feel I need to see this through."

Burlington City Council President Jon Schultz said he credits Hefty with guiding the community through tough times and with creating festivals and events that bring people together.

"We've been really lucky to have Jeannie as mayor," Schultz said.

Tuesday filing deadline

Would-be candidates in the spring elections have until Tuesday, Jan. 4, to file nominating petitions to get on the ballot for Burlington mayor or alderman.

Running for mayor requires 50 signatures, while running for alderman requires 20.

Three incumbent Burlington City Council members have announced that they are stepping aside rather than seek re-election: Theresa Meyer in District 1, Ryan Heft in District 2 and Steven Rauch in District 3.

So far only one other candidate has filed nominating petitions for each aldermanic seat: Corina Kretschmer of 616 Viewcrest Terrace in District 1; Sara Spencer of 241 Henry Street in District 2;

In addition to Echo Lake, Hefty has overseen city government's role in building the Burlington Community Aquatic Center, in completing a downtown riverfront redevelopment, in starting the winter ice festival and other new events, and in recovering from a devastating 2017 flood.

and Tom Vos of 124 Kings Court in District 3.

In District 4, incumbent Tom Preusker of 172 Karyl St. is running for re-election without opposition so far.

Vos, the father of Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, is attempting a comeback, after previously serving many years as an alderman and as president of the City Council. He was an alderman from 1982 to 2018.

First elected in 1992

Hefty was elected mayor in 1992 and was re-elected in 1994, 1996 and 1998. After living in Walworth County, she returned to

Burlington and was elected mayor again in 2016, unseating incumbent Bob Miller by a margin of 2,124 to 1,403.

Voters then re-elected her again without opposition in 2018 and 2020.

In addition to Echo Lake, Hefty has overseen city government's role in building the Burlington Community Aquatic Center, in completing a downtown riverfront redevelopment, in starting the winter ice festival and other new events, and in recovering from a devastating 2017 flood.

Among her favorite memories, Hefty cited the heyday of Burlington's reign as "Chocolate City U.S.A.," and also a campaign stop by then-President George Bush during his 1992 re-election campaign.

The mayor acknowledged that serving out her final term in City Hall will be difficult.

"I always have wanted to do the best for the City of Burlington, and it is time to make plans for a new leader," she said.

"Will it be hard to walk away? Yes," she said. But, she added, "The city's future is solid."

The deadline is 5 p.m. Tuesday for candidates for mayor or alderman to submit nominating petitions at the city clerk's office.

The elections will be held April 5, with primaries in February if enough candidates are on the ballot.