



Local couple celebrates 64 years as each other's Valentine Page 19



St. Norbert College men's hockey team ready for crucial series in Adrian Page 28



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Disregarded



More than a dozen homeless individuals lived in St. John's Park in downtown Green Bay for much of 2021. Josh Staloch Photos

The path to change starts with a plan, cooperation Local initiative provides roadmap to solution

"Every human being deserves a home."

BY HEATHER GRAVES EDITOR

BROWN COUNTY - Collete said she used to be

one of those people who judged a book by its cover. The 60-year-old mother, grandmother and New Community Shelter resident said she tries her best not to do that anymore.

"You never know, until you've really walked in our footsteps what we go through - the good, the bad and the ugly," Collette said. "I never asked to be in this predicament. But now, I can under-

stand what people here at the shelter go through. I think people really should think before they speak." Collette is bipolar, something she said she's struggled with since she was 20.



Collette said staying at New Community has been one of the best experiences to grow.

"Just like other people have struggles in their lives, I struggle every day, but I know that I have to dig in that tool box and get what I need to get through the day," she said. "But I know I wouldn't be able to make it without my friends here. I'm learning to live differently. It's tough, but I'm making it."

More than a jobs situation

St. John's Homeless Shelter Executive Director Lexie Wood said it's important to understand homelessness can't be solved by just getting a job.

See HOMELESS page 14

Not all in Brown County will have Feb. 15 primary

BY KEVIN BONESKE STAFF WRITER

BROWN COUNTY - Depending on where in the county voters reside, there may or may not be a primary for them to vote in Tuesday, Feb. 15.

There are no statewide or countywide primaries, so whether or not a given polling location will be open depends on whether there is a locally-based primary.

For example, the Village of Hobart's two polling locations at St. Joseph's Church and D2 Sports Pub will both be open with primaries on the ballot for the school boards in the West De Pere and Pulaski districts.

In the Village of Ashwaubenton, however, only voters in Wards 11 and 12, who live in the West De Pere School District, will cast primary ballots at the

See PRIMARIES page 7



Photo courtesy of Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes.

100-plus years later: Girl Scout Cookies still a hit

BY JEN HIRTHE CORRESPONDENT

NORTHEAST WISCONSIN - Tagalongs, Thin Mints, Do-si-dos, Trefoils, Samoas - for cookie-loving consumers across the country, the names are as well-known as their taste.

For more than 100 years, the Girl Scouts have held

the iconic annual cookie sale to help financially support their yearly activities.

From a small bake sale to door-to-door to online ordering, the annual sale has come a long way over the last century.

Girl Scout Cookie sales date back to 1917, just five years after Juliette Gordon Low started the organization in the U.S.

The Mistletoe Troop in Muskogee, Oklahoma, baked cookies and sold them in its high school cafeteria as a service project. The concept caught on.

Over the next decade, troops throughout the country started to bake their own sugar cookies, package them in wax paper bags, seal them with a

See COOKIES page 5

County Executive Committee takes no stance on Steffen proposal



BY HEATHER GRAVES EDITOR

BROWN COUNTY - The Brown County Executive Committee unanimously agreed Monday, Feb. 7, to not take a stance on proposed legislation by State Rep. David Steffen (R-Green Bay), which calls for the dissolution of the Lambeau Field Stadium District.

"We're now going to have discussion on what now at this point is basically the opinion of a single representative in the State of Wisconsin," District 17 Supervisor and

committee member John Van Dyck said.

The discussion was brought to the committee by District 9 Supervisor Pat Evans, who asked the county to take a public stance on the resolution.

"We should send this down to the Legislature and the governor's office and just say, 'Hey, no,'" Evans said.

Background

In November, Steffen proposed legislation to eliminate the Stadium District and transfer its responsibilities to the City

See PROPOSAL page 6



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HOMELESS from page 1

"I want to be clear," she said. "I think one of the big misconceptions that we're constantly battling, for instance right now, is if you drive around town, every employer is hiring. 'Help Wanted' signs are everywhere. Certainly, we are met with that question quite often and I get it: 'Why are the shelter numbers higher when there are so many open positions?' So, No. 1, homelessness, at its core, is not a jobs issue."

Wood said it's important to look beyond jobs and figure out why homelessness numbers are increasing.

"I feel like there's this perception that individuals experiencing homelessness should simply get a job," she said. "I think that's kind of the bias we're facing - that it's not a job problem. It's larger than that."

Wood said the COVID-19 pandemic is a contributor, as well.

"Look at telework opportunities and how many positions transitioned to work from home (because of COVID)," she said. "(That affects) a lower-class income household, that perhaps could not afford the internet, or could not afford the cost of computers and the different devices needed to do that."

That's where, Wood said, one starts to see how the pandemic exacerbated disparities that already existed for people who were fragile before the pandemic.

"You look at the child care centers and schools shutting down, and the effect that would have on a cost-burdened household or a single parent," she said. "They were disproportionately



Shannon Wienandt, left, and Beth Hudak with House of Hope, said the hoops those on the verge of being homeless have to jump through to qualify for many federally-funded programs can be frustrating. Heather Graves Photo

impacted by the pandemic itself."

Brenda John, communications and outreach coordinator for Wise Women Gathering Place (WWGP), said there is nothing lazy about being homeless, "where one is constantly planning and

afford rent, have poor rental histories, can't find a landlord to rent to them or can't find a big enough place - or a combination of any of those.

"Each person, each situation, is unique," she said. "There are so many more people without stable hous-

ing than the few who can be identified because they match the stereotype portrayed."

Beth Hudak, director of community engagement at House of Hope, said the bureaucratic hoops those on the verge of being homeless have to jump through to qualify for many of the

"In order for them to access any (federally funded) programs, they actually have to be in a car, on the street, literally homeless. We cannot help until the most catastrophic thing in their life has happened." - Beth Hudak

working to find a way to meet their needs."

"It isn't as easy as 'getting a job.' Getting a job, particularly one that pays a living wage, requires the personal and professional skills to land, and maintain, that job," she said. "People who are homeless need an incredible amount of resources to overcome their situation, beginning with the belief that it can be done. Every human being deserves a home."

John said many of the people seeking WWGP's help have jobs, but cannot

ing than the few who can be identified because they match the stereotype portrayed."

Beth Hudak, director of community engagement at House of Hope, said the bureaucratic hoops those on the verge of being homeless have to jump through to qualify for many of the

their life has happened. So, (if someone says) 'You can stay at your sister's house,' we can't help you until she kicks you out and you spend a night on the street."

House of Hope Executive Director Shannon Wienandt said somewhere down the line, someone probably put those barriers in place to

"There are so many more people without stable housing, than the few who can be identified because they match the stereotype portrayed."

- Brenda John

ensure only those who truly really need the help were receiving it.

"But then you can see the issue that causes," Wienandt said, "and how much more trauma people are going through because of it."

Hudak said she understands it's a triage system and everyone is doing their best to work with the system to make sure the most vulnerable people in the community are getting services.

"But if you always follow the rules, you don't see how things could be better, right?" she said.

Big ideas, potential big rewards

Terri Refsguard, New Community Shelter chief executive officer, said unfortunately, "what happens is, individuals are ready to leave (shelters) successfully, and there is no housing, no affordable housing for them."

"I would love to have this room filled with landlords, especially of larger properties, and dispel any stereotypes they have," Refsguard said.

Wood said the lack of affordable housing, though felt deeply in Brown County, is a struggle in every community in the country.

"Every community in America has an affordable housing crisis," Wood said. "When you look in Green Bay, depending on what study you look at, I've heard 8,000. I've heard north of 10,000 units

short of affordable housing across income levels."

She said the competition, as well as supply and demand, also drives up the cost of living.

"The cost of living is climbing 25% faster than income growth," she said. "So, individuals who are cost-burdened, or were on that threshold already, simply can't afford affordable housing."

Wood said 30% of a household income should be spent on housing-related costs.

"So, that would be your rent, or your mortgage, as well as your utilities and those basic costs," she said. "(Let's start) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), who are families receiving welfare assistance. Their monthly stipend, regardless of family size, is less than \$700. So even if I round up to \$700, 30% would be \$210 a month on housing-related costs. You can't find that in this community, and so if you spend more on housing-related costs, you certainly are spending less on food, less on child care, less on retirement, less on education, and it creates this domino effect."

Wood said research shows somebody who loses their housing due to eviction or foreclosure is 11-22% more likely to then lose their job.

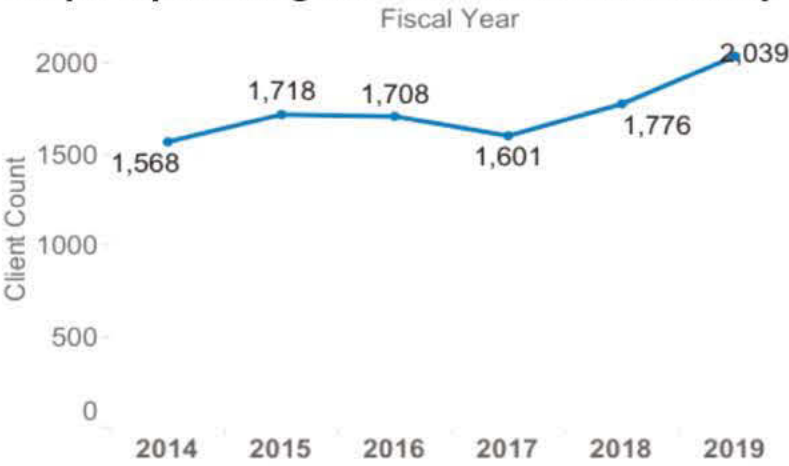
"So, it's not the other way around," she said. "It's not that they're losing their job and then losing their housing, but if they lose their housing, they are significantly more likely to lose their job. It just creates the spiral effect. They deplete their life savings, they don't look as appealing to future employers."

Wood said this then contributes to the generational impact, including lower graduation rates for kids.

"If we're going to address homelessness in this community, if we're going to address generational poverty, all of it comes back to addressing affordable housing," said. "So, that's where St. John's approach to a social-inclusive housing concept that we've

See HOMELESS page 15

People Experiencing Homelessness in Brown County



Greater Green Bay Blueprint to End Homelessness Graphic



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been talking about the past couple years (comes into play). It is the result of my doctoral work, so it's worded heavily in research. It's a model that looks at how do we create affordable housing that promotes social connection. How do we offer workforce housing to the workforce industries where the jobs are?"

Wood said wrap-around services are critical to success.

"Let's remove transportation and child care barriers," she said. "Let's bring onsite case management support. Let's set up a savings plan, where a portion of what they're paying in rent is set aside for their future financial goals. Let's create a model that is self-sustaining, which social-inclusive housing is proven to do, but it's scalable."

Wood said a model needs to be created where the revenue raised from a social-inclusive housing site can be reinvested in the concept itself, and "you can start to scale the social-inclusive housing to neighborhoods throughout the community, so we can actually start to add affordable housing."

"And in exchange, it decreases the affordable housing deficit, we can start to stabilize the rental market," she said. "So, we can start to stabilize the cost of living. We can start to bring service industry workers to where the jobs are."

Wood said a few years ago, the Wisconsin Realtors Association summarized it best, "Workforce housing is economic development, because it's where the jobs go to sleep at night."

"I think that really summarizes the need for affordable housing, because this



Brenda John with Wise Women Gathering Place said there is nothing lazy about being homeless, where one is constantly planning and working to find a way to meet their needs.

Josh Staloch Photo

County Executive Troy Streckenbach set aside funds in the county's 2022 budget, which was approved by the County Board, to add the position.

Streckenbach said the navigator will provide direction for individuals experiencing housing instability and homelessness who intersect with other available county services, focusing on people experiencing mental illness.

He said the position is a way for the county to use a proactive approach, instead of a reactive approach when tackling homelessness in the community.

"It's not the catch-all solution to homelessness, but it is one of the many factors that Brown County can play that has been identified as an early tool, or investment, that the community can make in helping address homelessness," Streckenbach said.

He said the creation of the position was led and driven by the county's Health and Human Services Department.

we continue to be a resource for maintaining their stability."

She said because its sup-

"Permanent supportive housing is a way to get people 'on their feet' for as long as they need it," she said.



Greater Green Bay Blueprint to Prevent and End Homelessness Graphic

“What happens is, individuals are ready to leave (shelter) successfully, and there is no housing, no affordable housing for them.” - Terri Refsguard

is our workforce," she said. "These are the individuals who are filling key positions for us, but we need to address affordable housing, and offer stability to households if we're going to be strong as a community."

It's this concept, supported by Wood's doctoral work, that St. John's is looking to dedicate part of its capital campaign toward.

"We are hoping to be able to launch it with a location that could offer at least 40 units - from studio all the way up to four bedrooms," she said. "We know that if you open a site with 40-45 units, you're not solving the affordable housing crisis, but you're investing in a different way of looking at housing that, as it scales to the community, over time can really start to make a dent in the deficit."

Housing navigator position

Brown County looks to address homelessness proactively with the creation of a housing navigator position.

ment, and is just one piece of the larger community approach in addressing homelessness.

Deputy County Executive Jeff Flynt said the Health and Human Services Department is currently recruiting for the position.

Permanent supportive housing

John said permanent supportive housing is a gaping need in this community.

"There needs to be long-term solutions," John said.

Guided by the housing-first model, she said WWGP has supported hundreds through its New Hope Transitional Living Program, which helps four to six families gain and maintain stable, long-term housing every two years.

"During those two years, the family has access to all of WWGP's resources to build skills, heal from their trauma and create a solid foundation for their future," John said. "Most of our resources are paid for through grant funding and therefore free for the participant, so

portive program extends for two years, WWGP is limited to how many individuals it can help each year.

"Green Bay needs some single-entrance permanent supportive housing multiplexes, with onsite services staff and property management staff," she said. "It is much cheaper for society to provide homeless individuals a home with supportive services than being institutionalized, or living on the street costing the community more in police calls, emergency room stays or shelter stays."

John said WWGP is working with a developer to submit a low-income tax credit application to the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) for a permanent supportive housing project, but "our challenge is finding land in an area zoned appropriately."

"That can vary, and it may be that it is their permanent home. Some people have been so harmed by trauma or were born with developmental challenges that require them to always have supportive services for them to succeed. Permanent supportive housing is a much better and cost-effective option than institutionalized housing, like mental institutions or prisons. People who have been homeless and are in need of supportive services can find stability in their lives with regular access to mental health practitioners and alcohol and other drug addiction services, once they have a roof they can count on."

Dave Pietenpol, board member and interim executive director for Ecumenical Partnership for Housing (EPH), said EPH provides

The Greater Green Bay Blueprint to Prevent and End Homelessness

is designed to be action-oriented, with initial "small wins" focused on reducing harm, as well as medium to long-term actions and tasks.

services to families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness in three areas of focus - transitional housing, long-term supportive housing and prevention.

Pietenpol said even if a family does all of the right things, and is ready for self-sufficiency, sometimes it is going to be very difficult to find housing within the community.

"So, our long-term supportive housing program is in response to supporting families who have done all the right things, but yet either due to poor credit scores, prior eviction no-

of the knowledge and skills necessary for self-sufficiency, because oftentimes they haven't learned that from their own families," he said.

Pietenpol said there is only so much that an individual organization can do.

"There's a little bit more that an individual community can do, but in order to really deal with the growing issue, we need a systemic solution at a national level, and right now it's harder and harder to be able to achieve that, given the polarization within the political environment today," he said.

tices or not having enough stable income, they just cannot find a place with a local landlord," he said.

Pietenpol said right now, EPH has 20 transitional units and 15 long-term supportive housing homes.

"It's a scattered-site model, in other words, we own a combination of duplexes and single-family homes, so that people can feel part of a neighborhood," he said.

Pietenpol said EPH has seen a trend related to who they are serving over the last several years.

"A move toward fewer situationally homeless families and many more generationally homeless, which as you can imagine, makes it even more challenging as families who are coming out of generational poverty just take longer, take more time to try to develop some

Blueprint to Prevent and End Homelessness

Last fall, a group of community leaders, guided by the Green Bay Community Foundation, laid out strategies to address homelessness in the community.

The Greater Green Bay Blueprint to Prevent and End Homelessness focuses heavily on housing insecurity, while at the same time educating the community on financial, social and emotional challenges that could lead to homelessness.

The initiative is a collective effort between the community foundation, the Brown County Homeless and Housing Coalition, Brown County United Way, the City of Green Bay, Brown County and the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

See HOMELESS page 18

HOMELESS
from page 15

Based on data used in the plan, homelessness went up 30% in Brown County between 2014 and 2019, which placed the county Continuum of Care (CoC) third in the top five CoC in the state—behind Milwaukee and Dane counties—for the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in 2019.

Rashad Cobb, community engagement program officer with the Green Bay Community Foundation and member of the initiative, said the group gathered data both at a service level and from lived experiences to develop a blueprint aimed at preventing and ending homelessness in the region.

Amy Stetzel, from Corporation for Supportive Housing, said an end to homelessness in Greater Green Bay doesn't mean no one will experience a housing crisis ever again.

"When we say we will end homelessness, what that means is, we will prevent homelessness whenever possible by decreasing the number of individuals and families that become homeless," Stetzel said in reference to the blueprint project. "We will make homelessness rare by really increasing the number of housing opportunities we have for people throughout the state, (and) increasing access to housing in whatever way we can. We are going to make each episode of homelessness as brief as possible. So shrinking the length of time people are experiencing homelessness. And we are going to end that continuous cycle of homelessness."

She said the blueprint plan is designed to be action-oriented, with initial "small



FRESH START HOMELESS FUND

Though the ball is moving to address homelessness in the community, long-term solutions to address the problem will take time to develop.

In the meantime, to conclude our six-week Disregarded series, The Press Times is partnering with Newcap in the creation of the Fresh Start Homeless Fund.

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wins" focused on reducing harm, as well as medium to long-term actions and tasks.

"I think there is some real potential to do some low-cost, no-cost work right away from the get-go," Stetzel said. "That is looking at policies that we have that might be actually creating barriers that we just didn't anticipate. I think there is some real potential, and the community has really expressed this, to

more financial resources to flow into affordable housing funds.

"I would encourage surrounding communities to take a look at that," Genrich said. "I know De Pere is already doing that, but I would love for our surrounding communities to also explore that option."

Genrich said, clearly, homelessness is a regional problem.

sure we have accessible and high-quality housing for our residents," Genrich said.

What that looks like at this point is unknown.

The city has until 2024 to allocate the money toward projects, and 2026 to spend it.

Cobb said this blueprint is for the Green Bay community, but it also could be used for surrounding communities.

"So, if you want to ap-

proach us, borrow pieces of it, get involved in our work and have it bleed over into theirs, we are here," he said.

Well, you didn't. You just enabled those people to stay out on the street. If you don't provide that, it at least forces them to go to those places and start building those relationships and start breaking down some of those barriers."

Allen said he understands people believe they are doing the right thing, and the thought behind the giving is genuine, but said it is actually making the problem worse.

"If the community keeps providing that service, it just exacerbates the problem, because what is the benefit of those people who are on the fence or not wanting to engage with those programs to get off the street, you know, and yeah, I know there are hurdles like mental health

and AODA, but what's their motivation?" he said. "Their motivation then turns to, 'If I stay at this park, the community is going to keep bringing stuff here.' If you want to give money or donations, give it to one of the organizations that help."

Hudak said yes, giving feels good, especially when the giver gets to decide how they want to do it.

"Homelessness is solvable, but it is going to take our whole community listening to people in these situations and giving how people experiencing homelessness need to receive support, not how you think they need to receive support," she said. "Sometimes giving in the way our clients need support the most isn't as fulfilling as, say buying Christmas presents for a kid experiencing homelessness with their family."

Hudak said it's a conversation House of Hope has to have with its supporters all the time.

"We hear from people all the time, 'I want to meet a client, I want to give this specially to a person. We want to hear the specific story,'" she said. "And we always have to say, 'I'm really sorry, but our client's ownership of their homeless journey is more important to us, because it is theirs.' And people aren't always happy to hear that, but we are extremely protective of our clients."

Wienandt said House of Hope staff doesn't act like they know all the answers.

"People know how to solve their own homeless situation," she said. "People know how to solve their own crisis, they just need you to support them as they work through it in the way that they chose."

“It is much cheaper for society to provide homeless individuals a home with supportive services than being institutionalized, or living on the street costing the community more in police calls, emergency room stays or shelter stays.”

- Brenda John

look at the way we are doing things."

In part from the guidance of the blueprint, Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich said the city plans to keep tax increment finance (TIF) districts open an extra year to allow

"This is not just a Green Bay program, or a Brown County issue," he said. "It is a statewide problem. It is a nationwide crisis. I think every community in this county needs to be thinking about trying to solve this issue. So I would say the same about our surrounding communities. Looking forward to having further conversations with other municipal leaders on that."

Green Bay also looks to tap into federal relief money to help address community homelessness.

A proposal by Genrich, which was recently approved by the City Council, sets aside \$6 million of the \$23.7 million the city received as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to be used toward affordable housing.

"I know people feel really passionate about housing in this community and making

proach us, borrow pieces of it, get involved in our work and have it bleed over into theirs, we are here," he said.

The full 92-page blueprint plan can be found on the community foundation website.

Meaningful help

Green Bay Police Lieutenant Nate Allen, the department's westside community officer working with the homeless population, said community support toward the homeless population is strong.

However, sometimes the help provided isn't in line with the need, and sometimes can cause additional issues.

Allen said he and his team spent hours in early November cleaning up St. John's Park in downtown Green Bay after more than a dozen homeless individu-

DISREGARDED: THE VIDEO
In partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, the educational partner of the NEW News Lab, The Press Times compiled a supporting short video to accompany the series' written pieces. Visit gopresstimes.com to view this impactful piece.

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