

\$1.50



Immanuel dedicates childcare center
 Page 20



BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Ben Meyer of Meyer Manufacturing noted much of the equipment in the shop classes at Medford Area Senior High was the same as when he was a student while technology has advanced greatly in the workplace. He along with (l. to r.) John Lange of Nicolet Bank, landscape company owner John Zuleger and Craig Willman owner of Craig's Automotive were among about two dozen area business and industry leaders who toured the school as part of a new partnership to seek grant funds to help boost technical education in the school.

Attempt to lower sports fees shot down

Fees will remain at \$60 per sport with \$240 cap per year for a family

BY BRIAN WILSON
 NEWS EDITOR

An effort to scale back the family maximum for sports fees fell short at Monday night's meeting of the Medford Area Public School District board of education.

Every February school board members review the district's fee schedule to look at adjusting it for the coming

school year.

Like many other districts, Medford implemented fees over the years to supplement revenue and close budget gaps. The sports fees were put in place in 2010 when the district was faced with a steep deficit due to cuts in state funding and needed to find new revenues or make steep cuts. Over the years the fee schedule has been revised and currently the district collects \$21,280 combined across all fee categories.

Board member Paul Dixon, a long-time opponent to any fees, said the athletic fees in particular came from a meeting where the board had to make \$425,000 worth of cuts in the same night. "It was a stopgap measure to put a small

cork in a big hole," he said.

"In a perfect world we would have zero fees," said board member Don Everhard. He said he recognized a place for them, but said he felt a \$240 family cap was too high. "I wouldn't mind seeing a lower threshold," he said, suggesting that for family who are blessed with multiple kids the price of having them in sports is a heavy burden.

District administrator Pat Sullivan noted the district has a process in place for students or their families to request a waiver from a fee due to financial difficulty. He said all they have to do is request and fill out a form.

See **SCHOOL** on page 5

Sparks fly at county

Veterans office claims harassment over locked office door complaints

BY EMILY GOJMERAC & BRIAN WILSON
 THE STAR NEWS

A locked courthouse office door and a department deciding to set its own hours over the Christmas holiday exploded into nearly two hours of yelling, name-calling, accusations of harassment and threats of federal lawsuits last week.

The Taylor County Veterans Service Committee met on February 16 with the agenda items to review departmental policy. The meeting was attended by a group of more than 15 area veterans.

According to committee chairman Ray Soper, there had been complaints from veterans about attempting to stop at the office and finding the door locked and not knowing what to do.

Committee member Dave Roiger proposed having a sign on the door stating when walk-in hours would occur and when there would be appointment-only hours along with a phone number for people to call to set up an appointment.

Veterans Service Officer Shellie Shaw defended her practice of keeping the hallway door to the office locked citing the need for confidentiality under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) which established privacy rules for healthcare information.

See **VETERANS** on page 4



Shellie Shaw

PAGE 8: Candidate profiles for Gilman, Rib Lake school boards



SPORTS: Wrestlers from area headed to state meet



INDEX

OPINION	6A	SPORTS	1B
PUBLIC NOTICES	13A	LIVING	14B
OBITUARIES	17A	CLASSIFIEDS	18B



Welcome to Medford!

Destination Medford

Women's Weekend

..... 2022

February 25 & 26



117124

★ Veterans defend service officer, committee seeks to ensure public access

Continued from page 1

"The topics that we discuss are very sensitive and personal," Shaw said, objecting to people interrupting them.

"If I am alone with a veteran, and sometimes this does happen, because they are a walk-in. If I don't lock that door, I get interrupted now I have just messed up," Shaw said. "If I don't have [benefits specialist Nikki Sherman] there, I have to do something. So if Nikki is with someone, and I'm with someone, and that person comes in, and I have instructed her now that you have to tell these people that want your help that they have to sit outside. Otherwise they just walk right in," Shaw said.

"This is what I want to do, I want to have set days and times, where they can walk in. These are the times that they can walk in. All other times are by appointment, because when I have a veteran talk about their stuff, and this is serious stuff, I need them to know that come hell or high water, I'm not going to let anything interrupt that conversation. I'm not going to pick up the phone, I'm not going to tell somebody, I'm sorry I'm with someone, obviously I'm with someone. I don't want that. I want that time that we set aside, to be our safe space. And if I can't provide that, I don't have trust, if I don't have trust, I'm not going to get the story. If I don't have the story, I don't have a good claim, if I don't have a good claim, the veteran has not been helped," Shaw said.

Things came to a head recently when according to Sherman, she was out with a sick child and clerk of courts office employees became involved because Shaw did not answer the door when she was on the phone with someone and with no sign out, the person did not know where to go.

According to Shaw, part of the problem is with the office configuration and layout which has remained largely unchanged since the early 1970s.

"I don't know of other CVSOs that don't have an office configuration that does not work," Shaw said.

Veterans attending the meeting interjected to defend Shaw from what some of them described as being ongoing harassment. Those speaking at the meeting targeted county human resources manager Marie Koerner although concerns about the office doors being locked and staff being non responsive when people knocked was raised by other county departments due to complaints from veterans who had attempted to contact the office.

In December, Koerner had contacted Shaw regarding the holiday hours that were posted on the CVSO door that were not in line with what had been set for the general courthouse. She also raised concern with Shaw about having the outer office door locked during work hours noting established county policy to have courthouse offices open to the public to walk in. Following that initial contact, the Veterans Service Committee met in December to approve the holiday office hours for the department.

Shaw cites these contacts describing them as part of the harassment she says she has been subjected to by the county.

Shaw told committee members that she has been offered a position elsewhere.

"I have not been looking for a job, but they see me as a valuable person, and I have to give them an answer today, I don't want to take that job, but the harassment is severe," she said. "In your packet you have paperwork on what the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) says about harassment. I have already filed a complaint of discrimination, I will have

an interview with the EEOC on the third of March. I have been slandered, my department has been defaced. I'm not taking any more of it. Any more slander, anymore defacement, written lies, about me, I am going to let the EEOC know, and I'm going to call a couple of veterans and ask them what they are going to do about their tax dollars going to salaries of people who harass," she said.

Throughout the meeting, several of the veterans interjected comments, interrupting committee members and making statements in defense of Shaw and disparaging other county employees.

Veteran Ted Obermann said he appreciates that Shaw locks her office door. He asked committee members if they were veterans.

"Unless you have marched and walked in my boots, you have no idea what this is all about," he said.

"You non-veterans need to step back, follow the lead, respect us. If you are going to respect a veteran, well then goddamn it leave these two ladies alone," Obermann said.

"And if you take offense because you didn't serve, that's your own personal shit, nor do I care, I did. There are three types of people in this world, sheep, wolves, and sheep dogs. You done did mess with the wrong veteran today," Obermann said.

"We are not trying to put her down at all. We are trying to set this policy because some of the people on this board are veterans and we understand," Roiger said, once again supporting putting a sign on the door with office hours and appointment information.

"We are not saying that she isn't doing her job," said committee member Rod Adams, saying that it was Shaw who came to the committee with a problem and, as he was saying, they were trying to address that.

Obermann cut Adams off interrupting the committee member to, once again, claim there was harassment going on.

"This harassment is unacceptable and as far as I'm concerned, not only do these individuals that are creating this harassment need to be fired, and as far as I'm concerned that office needs to be located out of this building because this building in and of itself, and the figment of the board and everybody else, allow this behavior to continue," he said, noting that St. Croix County has a separate building for CVSO.

Other veterans also voiced their support for Shaw and Sherman. Committee members repeatedly assured the veterans present that the committee did not have a problem with Shaw and was not trying to put her down in any way. Roiger noted the committee had given her permission to lock the door and was looking at ways to improve things for everyone.

Obermann continued to interrupt the meeting with comments disparaging other county employees and saying they are part of what he sees as bad in the country. He repeatedly called for the office to be relocated to outside the courthouse.

"I think the office hours will be a simple solution, that we can use as a start. We can look at relocation down the road, because relocation would be a major expense, where we could be using that money, for something else," Roiger said.

"You want to put a price tag on Veterans, really?" Obermann said.

"Well would you rather have the money used to help you, or to put the money towards a new building? I would rather see that money go to veterans than a building, so this is a start, this is going to be the policy, this is the way it is, if other people don't like it, then they can bring it to the whole county board process, but it all comes down

to us, we will stand and say this is the way it is," Roiger said.

Shaw repeated her claims of being harassed and how she has been documenting her claims. She said the county needs to rethink how it handles harassment complaints to go through an outside party.

"One of my jobs in the army was the Equal Opportunity Officer. That was me, in addition to being a dietitian. The other job I had was Consideration of Others Facilitator," Shaw said describing the interviewing, analysis and recommendations she would perform in those situations.

"I have been here less than a year. I am telling you sirs, this is ugly. If you were to tell me that there has not been a lawsuit, I would be flabbergasted," she said.

Soper asked if Shaw has spoken to the personnel committee with any concerns. Shaw replied that she has not. "I don't think that they would listen, I don't think it would be a fair interview process," she said.

Obermann, as well as other veterans present, continued to express anger toward the human resources department personnel, repeatedly disparaging them.

Human resources director Koerner objected saying it was inappropriate to be discussing this in an open session.

"I don't think that this is acceptable to have this in an open session at all," Koerner said.

"Of course not! It wouldn't be because this is about you isn't it?" Obermann said interrupting her.

"Excuse me I'm talking. Have respect for me when I am talking," Koerner said.

"You'll get respect when you earn it," Obermann said.

Koerner continued, "It is a personnel matter that should be done in closed session. Shame on you for whoever brought this to open session."

"Don't worry we're taxpayers, what the hell you talking about? When I was a young guy, we settled this shit out in the parking lot. That's how we should handle this anyways," said one of the veterans in attendance.

Soper worked to regain control of the meeting and bring it back to concerns that were raised about having the office door locked.

"There were complaints about people wanting to do a walk-in and facing the closed/locked door and not knowing what to do," Soper said.

"It's none of their damn business what goes on in the Veteran's office. When I go up to the district attorney's office, they close the damn door up there," one of the veterans said.

"I'm talking about walk-in clients who have been walking in to other offices wondering why the door is locked. That was the basis of the complaint, it didn't come from the HR department or anything like that," Soper said.

"It came about because veterans such as yourself were lost as to what to do when they face that closed door," he added.

"This is a fairly new problem, we developed this policy in the end of December for the door to be closed, but we ran into several problems such as people wandering up and down the halls. There have been several changes to the signs on the door, we are trying to find a balance between your privacy and an open inviting environment. I really don't appreciate being vilified for that. We are standing up for people that want this help," he said.

Committee members voted to approve posting a sign about office hours and how to make an appointment.

In other action, committee members:

★ Received the 2021 annual report from Shaw with the following data: Estimated Taylor County population as of 4/1/2020: 19,913 (U.S. Census); Estimated veteran population effective 2020: 1,274 (est. 6% of the total county population); There were 59 veteran deaths in Taylor County in 2021 (as reported to Taylor County VSO).

During 2021 the Taylor County Veteran Service Office reports the following activity: 1,279 Office visits (32% increase); 2,087 Incoming Phone Calls (7% increase); 1,668 Outgoing Phone Calls (40% increase).

There is about 81% success rate on VA Disability Compensation Claims since May of 2021. Since May of 2021, they have filed 82 service-connected disability claims for 65 individual veterans. Of the 65 individual veterans claims, 51 of these claims were completed from May-December 2021. Of the 82 claims, 25 of them have been approved, 7 have been denied, and 50 are pending decisions. There are approximately 35 claims being developed (in the process of researching due to the difficulty level). There are 3 appeals currently. In comparison, there were 42 veteran claims submitted for the year of 2020.

★ The veteran Outreach Day for 2022 was set for September 10.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR 50 HOMEOWNERS WHO WILL RECEIVE A KITCHEN UPGRADE!

FREE INSTALLATION ON A CABINET/REFACING PROJECT!

18 MONTHS, NO INTEREST, NO PAYMENTS! SENIOR & MILITARY DISCOUNTS! 2

\$50 AMAZON GIFT CARD WITH IN-HOME ESTIMATE! 3

MAD CITY KITCHENS

CALL TODAY! 715-941-4210

www.madcitykitchens.com

1. New orders only. Does not include material costs. Not valid with any other offer, or previous job. See representative for details. 2. Financing available with minimum purchase and approved credit. Mad City Windows & Doors, LLC. is neither a lender nor a lender. Financing is provided by third party lenders unaffiliated with Mad City Windows & Doors, LLC. Under terms and conditions arranged directly between the customer and such lender, all subject to credit requirements and satisfactory completion of finance documents. Any finance terms advertised are estimate only. Ask for details. New orders only. Not valid with any other offer, or previous job. Interest will be charged to your account from the purchase date if the purchase balance is not paid in full within the 18 month period or if you make a late payment. 3. With in-home estimate and product demonstration to homeowners. Limit one per household. Electronic gift card (e-gift card) voucher given upon completion of demonstration to be mailed to by homeowners. Subsequent e-gift cards do not carry e-gift cards for security reasons. E-gift card valid on in-home visits only, not applicable to Virtual Sales Appointments. Offer not sponsored or provided by Amazon and is subject to change without notice prior to reservation. Allow 2-3 weeks after demonstration to receive e-gift card. E-gift card valid at US-Appointments. Offer not sponsored or provided by Madman and is subject to change without notice prior to reservation. Allow 2-3 weeks after demonstration to receive e-gift card. E-gift card valid at \$50.

HAPPY 10TH BIRTHDAY AUTUMN

FEBRUARY 23

LOVE, MOM, DAD & IKE

116843