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Chelsea Fall Festival
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BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Jerrod Niemann was the headliner for the annual Parkfest celebration held in the Medford City Park on August 18. The event is put on by the Medford Area Chamber of Commerce with the help of volunteers and community business sponsors. See additional pictures on page 9.

Factory to close

Phillips-Medisize says Medford plant closure will impact 170 jobs

BY BRIAN WILSON
NEWS EDITOR

A long-time area employer has announced plans to shutter its Medford manufacturing facility.

On August 18, Phillips-Medisize announced plans to close its Whelen Ave. facility in Medford, in a series of phases by the end of 2023.

Phillips-Medisize is a global manufacturer of commercial and medical solutions. Company officials said the plans to close the local plant came "after careful consideration and analysis of its global footprint."

"A community never wants to lose a business, especially one that has been a good partner and employer within the community like Phillips-Medisize has been to Medford," said Christine Weix, Medford City Council President.

"Medford is very fortunate to have a very diverse field of economic opportunity which will help ease the loss of Phillips Medisize. Many other industry leaders in our area are looking for skilled employees and we are hopeful the displaced employees will find a new career within the Medford area," she said.

See PHILLIPS-MEDISIZE on page 16



Phillips-Medisize will close its Medford facility.

Veterans officer quits, claims harassment

Veterans service office remains open as county works to fill position

BY BRIAN WILSON
NEWS EDITOR

Taylor County veterans will continue to receive services despite the surprise resignation of veterans service officer Shellie Shaw on Friday afternoon.

On Tuesday, members of the county's

veterans service committee approved starting the process to fill the vacancy left by Shaw's resignation and approved getting the support Benefit Specialist Nikki Sherman feels she needs to keep the office running while the CVSO hiring process takes place. The county will also temporarily increase Sherman's wages due to the increased duties. This has been routinely done in the past when there have been vacancies in the CVSO position.

Shaw's resignation letter, addressed

to county human resources director Nicole Hager, was presented at the Veterans Service Committee on Friday afternoon. In the letter, Shaw made allegations of harassment and retaliation as well as stating she has been defamed by county staff and board members. Shaw's letter also cites an incident she says occurred following the July 20 committee meeting involving committee chairman Lester Lewis "physically and forcefully shoving another Veteran three times."

See VETERANS on page 4

Page 13-14 Second Section: New staff welcomed to area schools



SPORTS: Fall sports seasons in full swing



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★ Veterans service officer quits; claims retribution, harassment by county

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Shaw indicated in her letter that her husband would be dropping off her name badge, keys and fob because "as it is not safe for me to enter the Taylor County Courthouse." (See sidebar for the complete letter.)

Sheriff's deputies were at the July 20 meeting as well as Sheriff Larry Woebbeking who was there for a portion of the meeting. According to Woebbeking there has been no incident report filed with the sheriff's department from that meeting.

According to Lewis, the county's insurance provider has an independent investigation underway into the harassment allegations. He said the county is cooperating with that investigation and said anyone was welcome to provide information to the independent investigator. Lewis said the county has not released information in efforts to protect Shaw's privacy as an employee.

County attorney Courtney Graff notes the investigation was started some time ago and is ongoing.

Prior to the start of Tuesday's meeting, committee member Sue Swiantek read a statement condemning the county and particular members of the veterans service committee.

"I have never been part of an organization that doesn't look into how to fix the problem and work toward a solution. It seems Taylor County just keeps creating more problems and tries to eliminate "employees" who they think are trouble makers and "problem people." This is not the solution," Swiantek stated noting that "everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect."

She criticized the board for not utilizing members of the county board who have skills that could have helped address issues in the department.

"It is a shame that members of this committee have shamed, shunned, humiliated and basically destroyed a person who is loved and doing a wonderful job. Instead of enabling employees to succeed we are trying to make them look like incompetent fools. In the short time I have been on this board, I've seen and heard several issues like this. There are a few bad apples that are making the entire county board look like a bunch of stupid a-holes. Times have changed and the Taylor County Board has not," she said.

She cited petitions calling for certain members of the committee to be removed and called on them to heed the wishes of these residents and step down.

Swiantek's statement drew a round of applause from an audience dominated by area veterans, many of whom were in their American Legion uniforms.

During the meeting, committee members made quick work of approving moving forward with starting the process to fill the vacant CVSO position.

The agenda items to approve support for the office in the interim drew longer discussion.

Committee member Steve Voss reported that he spoke with the head of the state veteran's service officer orga-

nization who said that getting additional veteran service officer support at this time would likely be difficult.

He noted that with the recent signing of the federal PACT Act which has been described as the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history. He noted the eligibility period for claims opens October 1 and runs through October 2023. Voss said he was told that even after the county hires a CVSO, it could take six months or longer before they are up to speed and trained.

"We have a tough situation ahead of us," Voss said about the need to keep the office open.

Fortunately Sherman has the training and certifications to continue helping veterans. "She can do everything the CVSO can," he said, however because she is not a veteran she does not qualify to fill the position.

"She will be doing the job of the CVSO without the title," he said, saying that the county should make the pay representative of that increased workload during the next six months.

Committee member Rollie Thums noted that in the past when there has been vacancies in the CVSO the county has increased the pay of the other person picking up the additional workload. It will be up to the county's finance and personnel committee to determine what that pay increase might be.

"We need to focus on keeping [Sherman] and the office open," Voss said.

Lewis agreed stating they could look at getting some temporary clerical help which might help. He said committee members need to talk with Sherman and see what she needs to keep the office running.

"We have no intention of shutting that office down," Lewis said.

Voss expressed concern that delays in filling the position would create barriers for getting veterans the assistance they need.

Lewis explained that since it has been over a year since the county last hired for the position, there is a hiring procedure that needs to be followed including advertising for the position, reviewing applications, having selected applicants take a civil service exam and then do interviews before any job offer can be made. Even after hiring, unless the county can bring in someone with experience, the new CVSO will have to get accreditations.

Lewis noted that an interim pay increase for Sherman was not on the committee agenda for action, but said that in order to speed up the process he would ask that it be put on the agenda for the next finance and personnel meeting. He said it would be up to that committee to decide on the amount. A dollar an hour increase was mentioned earlier in the meeting about what was paid in a previous vacancy, Lewis said he felt it should be more than that. Regardless of when the finance and personnel committee acts on an increase, the county has historically dated the time of the temporary wage increase to when the additional workload began.

In addition to the open session discussion, there was a lengthy closed session meeting with attorney Graff and the committee to discuss "employment, promotion, compensation or performance data." When the committee came back into open session it was reported that no action was being taken from the closed session.

August 19, 2022

Nicole,

Effective immediately I resign from my position as the Taylor County Veterans Service Officer. I have come to this decision after reporting a hostile work environment first on December 22, 2021, to my initial VSO committee, then again on February 16, 2022. I then put the county on notice that the EEOC would be contacted if the harassment continues. Since then, retaliation has escalated as evidenced by removal of my first committee, continual disruptions to work, and the work environment created from late February through April 7, 2022, by Lester Lewis, chair of the VSO committee. Conduct by Lewis includes verbal assault on April 7, 2022, which was recorded by Sheriff in an incident report dated April 8, 2022.

County personnel, both board members and employees, have defamed my character as part of their campaign of retaliation and harassment against me. For example, it was insinuated that I was not fit for duty after requesting a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Wisconsin Fair Employment Act. My accommodation request was followed by a "non-disciplinary" administrative leave from April 29 through June 16, 2022 - a portion of which was without pay - and a mandatory forensic psychiatry evaluation. Upon my return to duty without restrictions, after the psychiatric evaluation showed me fit for duty, various individuals within the County's governance structure and/or employees suggested that I was not doing my job as the CVSO. Ultimately, my request for accommodation was denied without good cause. I filed a discrimination and failure to accommodate charge with the EEOC. Unfortunately, the same individuals retaliated against me for this.

On July 20, 2022, following public efforts by Lester Lewis to ridicule me, devalue my work, and devalue my accomplishments and office; Lewis left the board room after physically and forcefully shoving another Veteran three times. The County has failed to respond to this physical assault by a member of the self-governing Taylor County Board of Supervisors.

This leads me to resign for my own safety, as the hostile work environment has escalated and no action has been taken to deal with this properly. The threat of potential physical assaults remains. My husband will be bringing my keys, fob, and badge to you, as it is not safe for me to enter the Taylor County Courthouse.

Shellie L. Shaw

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From the Attorney's Desk
by Jason Krautkramer, J.D.
Eckert & Krautkramer, LLC
630 N 4th St.
Wausau, WI 54403
715-842-0907 jason@eckertlawllc.com

What is a Grantor Trust?

Every trust has at least one grantor, also known as the trustmaker or settlor, i.e., the person who creates the trust. So, it can be confusing when terms like grantor trust and nongrantor trust are used. Neither of these terms refers to the existence or nonexistence of the settlor, but are terms that have to do with the trust's income tax liability.

With a grantor trust, the settlor retains certain powers over the trust, such as the power to revoke (cancel) the trust, the power to add trust beneficiaries, and the power to borrow from the trust without providing collateral. Because the settlor has retained some level of control over the trust and its accounts and property, all trust income (whether ordinary or capital gains income) is taxed to the settlor, who reports the income on their own personal tax return (Form 1040).

Next week I'll discuss nongrantor trusts.

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