



Relationships

Former Kinship youth donates 16 bicycles to the program. **A11**



Fond farewell

County Clerk DeeAnn Cook retiring, handing reins over to deputy clerk. **A4**

2-time champ

Sheplee repeats as state 400-meter winner, adds title in 200. **B1**

City Council must revisit EMS transport decision

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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The Rice Lake City Council's decision to allow the Fire Department to buy two used ambulances will return to the floor after it was discovered it required a 6-2 vote, while the motion had passed 5-3.

For about a year the Rice Lake Fire Department has sought to add EMS transport services.

Marshfield Medical Clinic has a franchise agreement to provide EMS transport services, but beginning at the May 25, 2021, meeting of the City Council, interim Fire Chief Jason Jasicki has been advocating for adding EMS transports citing MMC's response times.

SEE EMS PAGE A3

Kids Fishing Derby angles for fun, fish



PHOTO BY MICHELLE JENSEN

Gracie Schnacky tries her luck with rod and reel. The Kids Fishing Derby, sponsored by the Rice Lake Area Men's Club and McCain Foods, put the fish in Rice Lake on notice on Saturday. Youngsters and their parents lined the shores near Veterans Memorial City Park, casting lines into the water in the hopes of landing the perfect catch. Every kid went away with a little something, and prizes for two bikes, fishing equipment and more were drawn.

Barron County Restorative Justice transitions to county departments

Move provokes questions from former workers, volunteers

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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When Goodwill's Barron County Restorative Justice Programs ceased to exist on June 1, a former volunteer raised concerns about the future of restorative programming in the county. However, the Department of Health and Human Services director assures that the programs will continue under the direction of herself and the sheriff.

"The program isn't going away, it's changing," Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald said. "We're changing who controls it, and it's going to be a great thing for Barron County."

From beginning to end

Barron County Restorative Justice Programs was incorporated as a nonprofit in 1999 and partnered with Goodwill Industries. It became a program of Goodwill in 2012 and an Advisory Committee was formed.

Near the end of 2021, Good-

will Industries made some policy changes in some areas, said DHHS Director Stacey Frolik, who served as chair of the eight-member Advisory Committee.

Monika Audette, Barron County Restorative Justice Programs executive director, tendered her resignation in December 2021. At the same time, Audette said she was exploring other fiscal agencies with which to partner to be the fiscal agents for restorative justice programming, according to Frolik.

As the head of the Advisory Committee, Frolik felt this put them in a bit of quandary as Goodwill indicated it would continue with Barron County Restorative Justice and hire a new executive director. Being in their positions, Fitzgerald and Frolik discussed the ramifications of Audette's move and



Frolik



Fitzgerald



Hoelt

whether it fit with the county's restorative justice model.

"If Monika is leaving restorative justice under the guise of Goodwill and is looking to partner with another nonprofit to start up restorative justice, is that what the community really needs for Barron County?" the pair asked. "We didn't think we needed competing efforts in restorative justice."

Frolik, Fitzgerald and the regional director of Goodwill programs discussed the situation. Then the sheriff and DHHS director presented a plan to the Advisory Committee for their departments to take over the same restorative practices as Goodwill provided. Members voted yes.

"There was no animosity or hard feelings between county and Goodwill," said Frolik.

"Goodwill staff worked well with county staff to make the transition as seamless as possible to ensure the disruption of service to be as minimal as possible."

County's plan

Under Frolik and Fitzgerald's plan, DHHS will take on Restorative Conferencing, in which victim and offender can talk with each other and hopefully find a path toward healing, Victim Impact Panels, where people who lost someone to a drunk driving accident, can speak to OWI offenders and students about to receive their driver's licenses, and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Programs.

The Sheriff's Department will handle Prime for Life, which addresses the drinking behaviors of minors; Teen Traffic, where officers explain how their offense could have injured or killed someone; and Catch My Breath/Vape Educate.

SEE TRANSITION PAGE A3

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

County housing could be fixed for \$3 million

I see that the Barron County Board submitted a request in January of this year for \$15,000,000, to refurbish 70 subsidized public housing units in the county. This seems excessive and not well thought out. According to my research, a 12 unit utilizing mid-range materials, a full basement, efficient doors and windows and “turn-key” finishing would cost an average of \$64,575 to \$86,000 per unit, not including land.

From the newspaper articles I have seen, the board tried to leverage \$3,000,000 of American Rescue Plan Act Funding to qualify for Federal Tax Credits to pursue a \$15,000,000 plan to renovate the units. It seems the units are about 50 years old and even though they have been well maintained (or should have been) over those years, need an average of \$214,285.71 each in rehabilitation and upgrading according to the County Board.

The \$3,000,000 they are trying to leverage would amount to \$42,857.14 for each of the 70 units. Fix what needs fixing, upgrade what needs upgrading and do it for the \$3,000,000! Some units need more work than other units so would get more money, but if all are safe and in good shape after the money has been used up, that is what the end goal should be, not hemorrhaging money.

If the county has not been neglecting the housing for the past 50 years, there is no excuse for wasting these huge amounts of money and giving rich companies tax write offs for using a lot more money than is needed to accomplish the needed work. The higher we drive inflation by spending money needlessly, the worse we make it for moderate and low-income folks in these units, and everyone else.

Do a little work and find the actual need, then meet it. Leave the “pie in the sky” wasteful spending to the state and federal governments who are doing a hell of a good job of ruining our economy right now.

*Dan Adams
Cameron*

The Second Amendment

When you read this article I am not against the Second Amendment. I was a hunter and sportsman since I was a youngster. But age took its toll. I still own my guns. These are my thoughts.

The Second Amendment to the Constitution was ratified Dec. 15, 1791; it reads “a well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”

America had recently finished a war with Britain for our freedom. The reason for this amendment was for shop owners, farmers, citizens, etc., to come together to form a militia in case of another invasion or if the government tried to control the people with a regular well-trained army.

Back then, it took a man how long to load one round? 1 minute, 2 minutes. Our founders back then had no idea someone would invent a gun that could load 30 rounds in 10 seconds, or I think this amendment would have been written differently.

For the sportsmen out there, the NRA wants you to believe the Democrats are out to take your guns away, not true. There are 180 million homeowners in America that have registered guns. They're not going to take our guns.

The NRA claims it's our God-given right to keep and bear arms; that's wrong! God did not write the Constitution, man did. And what about the God-given right for all those dead school children to have a right to a full life?

So when you pay your membership dues to the NRA, think about all those little children lying dead on school room floors.

Some say they need an assault rifle for protection. How many times have you heard of anyone protecting their home or family with an assault rifle? I haven't heard of any.

No citizen needs an assault rifle!

*Dan Emerson
Rice Lake*

More gun regulation needed

Just as we were processing the brutal shooting in Buffalo, headlines screamed of 19 murdered children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas.... two more in an unending string of mass shootings that capture our tears, prayers, outrage, and, sadly, inaction.

Let the following sink in. With more than 300 million guns in the civilian population, the U.S. ranks first in the firearm-related death rate among modern, industrialized countries, and second in the world for the total number of gun deaths. In the last 13 years, the U.S. has had 288 school shootings, compared to two in Canada, two in France, one in Germany and zero in Japan, Italy and the UK.

Firearms became the leading cause of death for American children and teenagers in 2020 (CDC). Sure, more doors can be locked, and anti-bullying training and mental health services made available, but let's not blame the victim. People who shouldn't have access to guns, including military style assault weapons, are getting them all too easily. While a 2008 Supreme Court ruling supported the right of citizens to keep and bear arms in their home for self-defense, Justice Anthony Scalia wrote for the majority opinion in 2008, that “like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited.”

With grief and rage driving us, we want to focus on increasing gun safety and decreasing gun violence. We regulate cars and limit access to them to reduce car deaths. Let's do the same for guns: universal background checks, protection orders, raise the legal age to 21, safe storage, straw purchases and bump stock bans, ammunition clip size limits, and “smart guns.” We desperately need community conversations across the political spectrum to mobilize support for and elect officials who will fight for these common sense measures.

*Mary and Jack Wichita
Mason*

Armstrong, Fitzgerald, Millermon running unopposed

Rep. Dave Armstrong, who represents Assembly District 75, faces no competition in the fall General Election ballot to retain his seat, but incumbent District 7 Congressman Tom Tiffany was issued a primary challenge.

Armstrong, a Republican from Rice Lake, took office on Jan. 4, 2021, after winning the Nov. 3, 2020, General Election.

Minoqua Republican Tiffany succeeded Sean Duffy as the 7th congressional district representative after winning a special election in 2020. His GOP challenger is David W. Kunelius II of Arbor Vitae.

The winner of the primary faces Democrat Richard Dick Ausman of Lac du Flambeau in the General Election. Ken Driessen of Hayward also is seeking election to District 7 as an independent, although his ballot status has not yet been approved.

Assembly, Senate races on Barron County ballots

Republican Rob Summerfield of Bloomer is running for another term for Assembly District 67. His challengers are Democrat Jason D. Bennett of Chippewa Falls and Libertarian Bryce Thon of Bloomer, whose ballot status is pending.

Romaine Quinn, a Republican from Cameron, and Democrat Kelly Westlund of Ashland will be on the ballot to succeed District 25 incumbent Sen. Janet Bewley, a Democrat who chose not to seek re-election.

GOP Sen. Kathy Bernier of Chippewa Falls also chose to not seek re-election to represent District 23. Three Republicans are vying on the primary ballot to take her place: Brian Westrate of Fall Creek, Sandra Scholz of Chippewa Falls and Jesse James of Altoona.

County races

Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald and Clerk of Circuit Court Sharon Millermon will run unopposed for their respective seats in Barron County in the fall General Election.

The primary election will be held on Aug. 9, and the General Election on Nov. 8.

» **VERNACULAR**

FROM PAGE A2

People who say small things don't matter have never slept in a room with one mosquito. If only Noah had swatted those two on the ark!

Sorry if I've been a pest or nitpicker, but our language is swarming with insects!

*Dan Adams
Cameron*

It's always a good thing, though, when the Chamber director sends out an email that starts out, “I thought I would put a bug in your ear.”

Just remember your local newspaper makes a great swatter as well as a trustworthy source of information. Happy summer, everyone!

*Dan Emerson
Rice Lake*

» **EMS**

FROM PAGE A1

At its May 24 meeting, the council approved the purchase of two used ambulances using an American Rescue Plan Act grant and a one-time fund balance transfer, as well as authorizing the Fire Department to submit an opera-

tional EMS transport plan to the state, sign a lease agreement for medical equipment, buy perishable supplies and sign a contract with Lifequest for billing and collections.

Voting in favor were Councilmembers Todd Larson, Gina Sookiayak, Jim Resac, Harlan Dodge and Marlene Dirkes. Mark O'Brien, Doug

Edwardsen and Keith Moffat voted no.

However, as the purchase required a significant amendment to the budget, the motion needed to pass 6-2, Mayor Justin Fonfara said.

Therefore, the proposal will be brought forward again at the June 14 regular meeting of the City Council.

» **TRANSITION**

FROM PAGE A1

The Sheriff's Department and DHHS will work with someone in the judicial office for administrative support.

Outside the system

But one program will not continue, and Frolik's and Fitzgerald's plan isn't without its critics, including Mary Hoeft, a longtime Barron County Restorative Justice Programs volunteer and former member of the Advisory Committee.

When Goodwill changed a guideline that said the program's school community outreach workers — employed by Goodwill — could not work alone with anyone younger than 18, the workers felt they could not operate the pre-truancy program under the new restriction.

“Our hands were tied,” said Heidi Carlson, who worked with the Rice Lake School District for two years as a school community outreach worker.

The program was dissolved and workers were laid off on March 25, according to Carlson, who now works for CC We Adapt. She lauded the program as it worked alongside the system but not within the system.

Some families who struggle with poverty, mental health issues and substance abuse don't trust the system but would reach out to school community outreach workers, she said. Carlson visited

homes to discover the roots of chronic truancy and address it before it needed to be referred to the county. Occasionally workers would transport students or meet alone with them in their school offices, and that was no longer possible under the new guidelines.

If the truancy continued despite help from school community outreach workers, it was passed on.

“We tried everything we could,” Carlson said. “Then a social worker got the case.”

Carlson said the county does a great job, but it's stretched pretty thin, and DHHS is still part of the system many families distrust.

Frolik did not necessarily disagree with that statement but said that community outreach continues in the schools.

Goodwill issued the following statement: “We believe in and are proud of the great work that has been accomplished in partnership with the school community outreach workers,” said Jennie Moore, vice president of Mission Services at Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin (Goodwill NCW). “After several discussions, Goodwill NCW and the area school districts mutually decided to transition the program fully within the schools.”

Hoeft, whose daughter was a school community outreach worker in the Cumberland School District and has been hired at the school, also emphasized the importance of

be able to work outside of the system. But the former volunteer also posed many other questions about the programs' transition to Frolik's and Fitzgerald's leadership.

What plan?

Hoeft does not believe sufficient plans are in place from Frolik and Fitzgerald to adequately take over restorative justice programming.

She asks, will Restorative Conferencing continue considering the hours it takes to meet, draw up contracts and then follow up to ensure the contracts are fulfilled? And how will Victim Impact Panels be handled considering how much time and effort it takes to find and groom speakers, and work with them afterward to ensure they're OK? Prime for Life training takes a year, \$1,000 for funding and a big commitment, Hoeft said.

Hoeft also questions the assertion that no extra staff will be needed, and thinks DHHS is overwhelmed now.

Frolik said DHHS will not be hiring anybody in addition to provide restorative programming and the Sheriff's Department already has staff trained for programs it will be taking over.

Program cost

Frolik said she and Fitzgerald believe they can deliver the restorative justice programs in a fiscally responsible manner without further tapping taxpayer dollars.

Barron County Restorative Justice cost about \$300,000 to operate, “a huge budget,” in Frolik's opinion.

Barron County contributed \$50,000 annually, Frolik said, and DHHS contributed an additional \$32,000 through 2019 until a grant was cut. The school districts of Cumberland, Barron and Rice Lake each gave \$35,000 annually. For the most part Goodwill provided the remaining revenue.

With the Sheriff's Department and DHHS taking over restorative programming, they may save money, Fitzgerald said. Frolik noted that they will evaluate the programs to see that they work and have an impact on participants and the community.

“I think people have the impression that the sheriff and I want restorative justice to go away and that's not the case,” Frolik said.

For Hoeft, the money that mattered came in the cost savings to the county for not sending juveniles to Lincoln Hills or Copper Lakes juvenile detention center at a cost of \$397,000.

“We're meeting with those juveniles,” Hoeft said. “We're handling things in a way that's keeping them out of trouble.”

Alternative proposal

Hoeft said she and former Barron County Restorative Justice Executive Director Polly Wolner have another plan they'd like to bring forward. They want to rebuild the

program by asking the County Board to give them \$120,000 for the next two years to hire a director for restorative justice programs. Hoeft and Wolner would put together an advisory board, and the former executive director would mentor the new hire and show them the grant-writing ropes.

After two years the pair would ask for \$50,000 per year to maintain the programs. Also during that time they would look for another organization to sponsor Barron County Restorative Justice, such as the Salvation Army or a business owner who believes in it, Hoeft said.

“Hopefully this will get it back on the road to the program that it was,” Hoeft said.

Frolik said she can't say she's necessarily supportive of the proposal from Hoeft and Wolner.

Will administration of restorative justice continue as it is forever? Likely not, Frolik said. But the DHHS director said she and Fitzgerald felt they needed to step up to the plate to ensure restorative justice didn't go away in Barron County.

“If somebody comes in and says I want to do my own start-up for restorative justice and I'm going to do all of these things, and we feel confident that's the case, we'll be supportive of that,” Frolik said. “We want to continue to ensure that it exists in our county and yet be fiscally responsible.”