

The Record-Review

A WISCONSIN HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

ATHENS

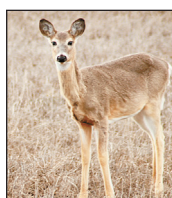
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TWENTY PAGES



PART TWO OF A TWO-PART SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

Is this the face of justice?

A county jail crisis starts with City of Wausau policing patterns

Marathon County's justice system operates at the brink of crisis. The mass of people arrested by county law enforcement agencies are low income, unable to afford an attorney. The local state public defenders office often fails to promptly provide these "indigent" defendants with lawyers. These inmates must wait for their day in court. People with mental health issues are also arrested in large numbers. Unable to get treatment, these defendants return to jail again and again. The county jail in Wausau overflows with inmates.

The justice system can't handle all of these defendants. The system grinds to a crawl, cases linger and the cost of running the jail escalates.

The result is that justice is delayed to the point of denial. The county jail is filled with people not serving a sentence, only waiting for trial or routine hearings. Marathon County Sheriff's Department Corrections Division administrator Sandra LaDu reports that out of 283 inmates in the Marathon County Jail on Aug. 5, only 63 were serving sentences.

County leadership has tried to address the problem. Over the past few years, law enforcement has dramatically cut back on people it sends to jail. Many low risk defendants are not transported to jail, only given a date to show up in court.

The county hires lawyers for low income individuals. The county in 2021 spent \$724,422 on legal assistance for resource-strapped people, including \$310,820 on criminal attorney appointments.

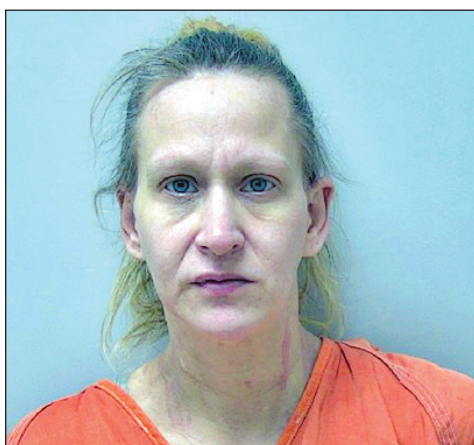
Still, the county jail overflows with inmates. Unable to find room for pris-



Paul Osterman
718 days in jail pre-sentence



Alan Wilson
935 days in jail pre-sentence



Rebecca Erickson-Boe
862 days in jail pre-sentence



Jesse Ingalls
683 days in jail pre-sentence

oners in its downtown Wausau jail, the county houses defendants in the Columbia, Taylor, Lincoln and Marquette

county jails. On Aug. 4, there were 13 inmates who had spent over a year in jail, including one who had been there

for 1,152 days.

Jail overcrowding puts pressure on the county budget. The cost to house, feed and provide health care for people awaiting trial is proving increasingly burdensome. The monthly cost of providing medications (including mental health prescriptions) to Marathon County inmates soared to \$44,195 in July of this year. The cost of providing mental health medicine for one inmate in a single month was \$6,600.

Root causes

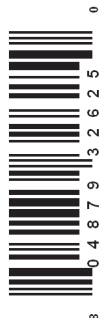
The causes for the courthouse backlog are complex. Some originate in the courthouse. Cases with police officer video camera footage, for example, require more time to prepare, slowing the wheels of justice. The COVID-19 pandemic created a court calendar backlog not just in Marathon County, but statewide.

Other causes, however, are outside the courthouse. They originate in who law enforcement arrests.

In Marathon County, a key reason behind the courthouse's clogged court docket is that law enforcement, specifically the Wausau Police Department, arrests and brings to jail more low income defendants than the local eight-attorney public defenders office can represent in a timely manner.

The number of low income people arrested in the county is surprisingly large. While the U.S. Census only counts 6.7 percent of county residents in poverty, the Wisconsin State Public Defenders Office reports that 85 percent of those prosecuted for felonies and 65 percent of those charged with misdemeanors are poor enough to

See **IS THIS THE FACE OF JUSTICE?** / page 4



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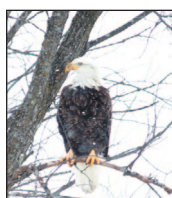
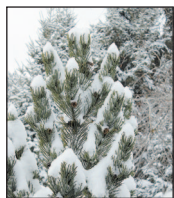
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Stratford cuts money from 2023-24 budget

By Casey Krautkramer

The Stratford Board of Education last Wednesday approved nearly \$400,000 in cuts to next year's school district budget as a result of failed referendums in April and November last year.

Dr. Nathan Lehman, Stratford schools superintendent, said the school district will need to make budget cuts in future school years even after the school district cuts



Dr. Nathan Lehman

\$390,000 from the 2023-24 budget. He said projections for budget deficits are now anticipated to be approximately \$991,000 for the 2024-25 school year and \$1,443,000 for the 2025-26 school year.

"The staff and school board worked extremely hard to find ways to decrease budgets without heavily affecting class sizes and subject areas," Lehman said. "I am very impressed with the collaborative work of our staff, leadership team and school board."

He said since 2018 the Stratford School District has cut 12 staff positions, cut budgets and froze athletic coaches' pay, changed staff benefits and worked on other creative ways to reduce over \$1 million from the budget.

"With all of these cuts, we know we still need to go to a referendum to make up the anticipated deficit of over \$1.4 million by the 2025-26 school year," Lehman said.

See **BUDGET WOES**/ page 2

Cuts are looming

Board to decide on budget reductions at March meeting

By Casey Krautkramer

Andrea Sheridan, Athens schools superintendent, unveiled on Monday a list of \$900,000 in possible cuts to this year's school district budget that need to be made regardless if the April 4 referendum passes.

The Athens Board of Education will make its final decision on what items in this year's school district budget will be cut at its next regular monthly meeting currently scheduled at 6 p.m. on Monday, March 20, in the middle/high school library.

Athens School District is asking vot-

ers on the April 4 spring election ballot to authorize it to exceed its revenue limit by \$1.67 million for the 2023-24 school year and by \$1.2 million per year for the 2024-25 through 2026-27 school years for non-recurring purposes consisting of operational and maintenance expenses. If the referendum fails, then the school district would need to somehow find ways to cut these additional amounts of money each school year that it didn't receive from taxpayers.

The following is a list of \$900,000 in cuts Sheridan has proposed the school board makes at its March meeting based off her discussions with school district staff. She said personnel comprises 80 to 90 percent



See **DIRE STRAITS**/ page 16

Big week for Athens students

One heads to Ohio to perform with national choir, the other travels to Madison to wrestle in the state tourney

By Hannah Alden



Elle Gauerke



Cambrea Sarasin

Athens students and staff were all cheers and smiles at a pep assembly on Tuesday hosted for two local students who have recently accomplished some big feats.

The event's honorees were Cambrea Sarasin, who was selected to sing with the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) National Honor Choir, and Elle Gauerke, Athens' first female wrestler to compete in the state tournament.

Sarasin, a junior, will travel to Cincinnati, Ohio, this week to rehearse with the choir on February 22-25 and perform in the choir concert on Saturday. The ACDA is the largest professional organization for choir directors in the country. It hosts regional and national conventions on al-

See **STAR STUDENTS**/ page 3



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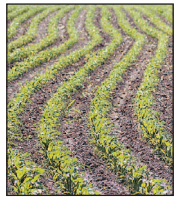
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Marathon County to get \$1.4M more from state

By Kevin O'Brien

Marathon County will receive an additional \$1.4 million in state aid next year after Gov. Tony Evers signed a bipartisan bill in Wausau last week that will deliver a long-awaited boost in funding for local governments across the state.



Tony Evers

Cities, towns and villages throughout the county and Wisconsin will also see an increase in shared revenue from the state, which had stagnated for years under the old funding formula. With the new law in place, 20 percent of the state's five-cent sales tax will go into financial assistance for local units of government, resulting in a roughly \$275 million hike in aid statewide over the next two years.

The county's Human Resources, Finance and Personnel (HRFP) committee happened to meet last week on the same day, June 20, that Gov. Evers was in the county to sign Assembly Bill 245, which ties the annual growth in sales tax revenue to state aid distributions.

Committee chairman John Robinson said the county's additional shared revenue will amount to a nearly 35 percent increase over this year's total. Percentage-wise, this is on the lower end of increases for counties, but that's due to the fact that many counties were getting such a low amount under the old funding formula, he noted.

Oneida County, for example,

See **STATE AID/** page 3

Stratford removes two books Committee decides to keep other 12 books in classroom

By Casey Krautkramer

Stratford School District advisory committee members on Monday decided to remove two books titled, "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" by author Stephen Chbosky and "Welcome to the Monkey House" by Kurt Vonnegut from the free reads section available for 10th graders to check out in a classroom where sixth graders are also taught.

Dr. Nathan Lehman, Stratford schools superintendent, appointed the nine-member advisory committee in response to two Stratford School District families filing formal complaints with the school district. They say they wanted 14 books containing vulgar language and sexual references removed from the teacher's classroom.

The advisory committee consisted of Stratford teachers Rachel Bargender, Curt Schmidt and Jo Lappe; school librarian Wanda Grewe; community members Lisa Frombach, Terrie Kitchner and Shelly Weis and Stratford Board of Education members Kitty Guyer and Tyler Skaya.

See **BOOKS/** page 2



ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETS—Stratford School District advisory committee members Lisa Frombach, left, and Terrie Kitchner, discuss the books they read at Monday's meeting.

STAFF PHOTO/CASEY KRAUTKRAMER

Edgar does not contract with athletic trainer

By Casey Krautkramer

The Record-Review discovered after publishing last week's story titled, "Athens keeps athletic trainer," that the Edgar School District hasn't had an athletic trainer since Covid.

Cari Guden, Edgar schools superintendent, said on Monday Edgar had always contracted with an athletic trainer up until Covid hit.

"After Covid, we were unable to find a trainer to work in Edgar," Guden said. "Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, the WIAA required all paid coaches shall be certified and will maintain certification in First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification and AED operation. During football season, we typically have an ambulance on site to assist with injuries. During the other sport seasons, the coaches assist until we are able to get help from an EMT/ambulance depending on the severity of the injury."

Last week's story in The Record-Review stated the Athens

See **TRAINER/** page 3



Streveler sisters pet a Jersey cow

Sisters Ashlyn and Ava Streveler of Stratford pet the Jersey cows at Redetzkes' No Joke Dairy in Stratford during Saturday's Marathon County Partnership for Progressive Agriculture dairy breakfast. The town of Eau Pleine dairy farm is co-owned by married couple Matt and Brittany Redetzke and Matt's brother, Sam Redetzke. They milk a total of 200 cows. The herd is comprised of various breeds of cows including Brown Swiss, Lineback, Guernsey, Jerseys and a few Holsteins.

STAFF PHOTO/CASEY KRAUTKRAMER



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