



Girls' soccer preview
Sports, Page 14

Project North returns
Community, Page 2



THE NORTHWOODS RIVER NEWS

Supreme Court
race heads to
the finish line
State News, Page 3

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Schiek, Burns vie for Oneida County judgeship

By Richard Moore
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Earlier this year, during the spring primary season, *The Lakeland Times* asked the candidates for Oneida County circuit judge — incumbent judge Mary Roth Burns and Oneida County district attorney Michael Schiek — a set of the same questions and both responded in timely fashion. (Oneida County corporation counsel Mike Fugle also answered the questions but has been eliminated from the race.) Burns answered the questions one-by-one; Schiek combined his answers in an in-sum statement. We thought readers would like to refresh themselves with both candidates before they head to the polls next Tuesday:

Oneida County judge Mary Roth Burns

What about your career experience most qualifies you for position of circuit court judge? Or, related, of all your skill sets, what is the most important that you could bring — or do bring — to the bench as a judge?

I am the only candidate

See **Judge...** page 9



FIRE DESTROYS RHINELANDER RESTAURANT



HEATHER SCHAEFER/RIVER NEWS

Firefighters from three departments responded to R&T's Dinky Diner (230 Thayer Street) Tuesday evening, March 28, 2023, after black smoke was reported coming from the back of the building. Firefighters were on scene for several hours containing the fire and ensuring it did not spread to neighboring buildings. The building, constructed in 1896 and the former home of the Sportsman's Cafe, is a total loss, according to Rhinelander Fire Chief Brian Tonnancour.

Dinky Diner 'a total loss'

By Heather Schaefer
OF THE RIVER NEWS

A historic building that housed a well-loved Rhinelander eatery was destroyed by fire Tuesday evening. R&T's Dinky Diner is a considered "a total loss," Rhinelander Fire Chief Brian Tonnancour said Wednesday.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, he added.

Rhinelanders firefighters were called to the restaurant, located at 230 Thayer St., just before 6 p.m. Tuesday as dark smoke could be seen billowing from the back of the building. They were soon joined by firefighters from the Pine Lake and Pelican fire

departments who responded to a request for mutual aid.

Almost immediately a crowd began to gather in the area known for decades as the hollow, home of the city's "hobo jungle" in the Depression era. Friends and customers embraced the diner's owners, Rick Covin and Terrie Bowman, and offered words of support while watching the fire crews work to contain the fire.

Covin stated they had closed for the day at approximately 2 p.m. and no one was inside the restaurant at the time. The building dates back to 1896, he said.

See **Fire...** page 9



RENEE DRASZKIEWICZ/RIVER NEWS

A friend embraces Terrie Bowman and Rick Covin, owners of R & T's Dinky Diner, as firefighters worked to contain a fire inside the restaurant Tuesday evening, March 28, 2023.

PFAS issue shadows race for Stella town chair

By Heather Schaefer
OF THE RIVER NEWS

The discovery of high levels of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) contamination in the drinking water in the Town of Stella in late 2022 has upended the lives of a number of local families and motivated both candidates for town chairperson to seek election.

Kristen Hanneman is running for town chair to help

her fellow townspeople navigate the challenges associated with PFAS. At the same time, current town chair David Brunette is seeking to retain the office he's held for nearly four decades as the town faces some of its most difficult days.

Voters will make their choice on Tuesday, April 4.

Hanneman, who would be the first woman to serve as town chairperson in Stella, has experience in municipal

government having served as treasurer for the City of Eagle River. She is also currently employed as state and local government auditor.

A resident of Stella since 2008, Hanneman noted that her family has been directly impacted by the PFAS contamination.

"What piqued my interest (in running for town chair) was the PFAS issue we're having out here and wanting to be more involved with the

process and making sure that we see progress," she said. "My family is directly affected by the PFAS issue so to me it's really important."

Like her neighbors, Hanneman said she learned her well had dangerous levels of PFAS after it was tested as part of a statewide well testing project conducted by the DNR.

"It's absolutely terrible," she said of the contamination. "It's

See **Stella...** page 12

Fire

From page 1

Many in the crowd could be heard expressing their love of the restaurant, a fixture in the community, as well as its predecessor the former Sportsman's Cafe, a popular hangout for generations of Rhinelander residents.

According to Tonnancour, Rhinelander firefighters were able to "initiate an aggressive fire attack to stop the extension of fire into neighboring occupancies."

The adjacent apartments were evacuated to safety and all occupants were accounted for by Rhinelander Fire and Police, he said. The Reve coffee bar, at 232

Thayer, suffered slight smoke damage, according to the fire department.

There were no reports of injuries on-scene, and no medical care was requested, Tonnancour added.

Six residents have been temporarily displaced due to power and gas being turned off to the units. The Red Cross is assisting residents with temporary shelter.

Early Wednesday morning, the owners of the diner expressed their devastation in a Facebook post.

"My heart is broken. Not just for the loss of our business, but for all that it stands for," the post reads. "We've worked to make R&T's Dinky Diner a second

home for our customers. Our motto is 'where good friends gather' and we honestly mean it. Our staff is our family, and we are so concerned about them, as well. We are working to make sure they survive and thrive. The next few days will surely be a whirlwind as we gather information and see what the future holds for us. Thank you to every firefighter, every sheriff, every city officer, every customer who stood in the cold to comfort us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This town and its people are our backbone, and with them we will keep standing. We love you all and will keep every-

one up to date with whatever happens next."

The owner of The Reve also posted an update for customers.

"Due to a structure fire in the building next to us, we are not able to conduct business," the post reads. "We will give out information about The Reve's progress on the situation as soon as we can. We appreciate your prayers & support. Thanks to our customers we have come this far, and we will not give up."

The Rhinelander Fire Department press release included a thank you to the Rhinelander Police Department, Oneida County sheriff's deputies, Pine Lake Fire Rescue, Pelican



BOB MAINHARDT FOR THE RIVER NEWS

Firefighters work to contain a fire at R & T's Dinky Diner, located at 232 Thayer Street in Rhinelander, Tuesday evening, March 28, 2023.

Fire and Rescue, the Red Cross, WPS, Oneida County EMS, and the Salvation Army for their quick response to the scene

and assistance to the affected residents.

Heather Schaefer may be reached at heather@rivernews.com.

Judge

From page 1

in this race who is a judge. There is no substitute for judicial experience. Every day in my courtroom I apply the law to the facts, without politics or ideology. And I invite anyone to come to my courtroom anytime to watch me in action and see for yourself the work I do on the bench to uphold the rule of law, to keep our communities safe, and to make sure everyone gets a fair shake.

Judges also need diverse legal and real-life experiences. As an attorney, I practiced law in 10 Wisconsin counties before more than 20 different judges. That experience gave me important insights about judicial temperament, style, procedure, and attitude. I saw firsthand what was most effective, fair, ethical and efficient. My own strong work ethic and my extensive courtroom and legal experience informs my work in my courtroom.

My life and career experiences are diverse as well. I went back to law school after my two girls were grown. They were raised in Rhinelander, went to our public schools, and graduated from Rhinelander High. My experience outside of the law includes owning a small business, working as a reporter for the Rhinelander Daily News, and teaching. That broad life experience also helps me be a better judge.

Please describe your judicial philosophy — the underlying set of ideas and beliefs that guides you in cases and in interpreting the law? Would you describe yourself as a judicial activist, or judicial minimalist?

I am a common-sense judge. My judicial philosophy mirrors my personal philosophy: respect others, listen carefully when people are before me, be calm, honest and fair, know the law and follow it.

What is the role of a judge?

The role of a judge is to apply the law fairly, objectively and equally to all parties, to protect the rights of all parties, and to proceed with honesty and transparency. Residents need to

have confidence that the judicial system is operating in a fair and timely fashion.

A judge needs to convey fairness by being equally respectful to all parties, moving cases along efficiently, and communicating effectively and patiently. In order to communicate effectively in this era, a judge must also be technologically proficient so that Zoom hearings run as smoothly as in-person hearings. And, especially at hearings about criminal cases (which include homicide, robbery, sexual assault), a judge should limit the use of legalese and strive to speak plainly and simply so that defendants understand when the judge explains their rights. In the courtroom, the judge should be able to maintain order without sacrificing compassion.

In addition, organization is important to manage the calendar and the staff. The judge is also part of the larger courthouse team. She must work with other judges, attorneys, and courthouse staff — and we are fortunate to have excellent courthouse staff in Oneida County — to maintain a positive, collegial relationship. That atmosphere helps foster confidence in the judicial system of Oneida County and the State of Wisconsin.

What do you think is the most important attribute a circuit judge should have?

There are three: independence, intelligence, and integrity. A judge must come to each case without a preconceived idea about the outcome. A judge must not be beholden to special interests or political ideology — a judge must know the law and be able to apply it in complex cases.

Finally, a judge must have integrity: a judge must have the highest standards, work in an organized, efficient and ethical fashion, and be committed to following the law.

Do you support bail reform in Wisconsin, and why or why not?

When setting bonds (i.e. bail), judges should have the discretion to consider a person's criminal history, ties to the community, family support and ability to pay a cash bond — as well as the likelihood that that person will show up for his or her next

court hearing. But there is also an inherent unfairness if a cash bond is mandated for all cases, because wealthy individuals charged with crimes are able to pay that cash bond while those with less means cannot. Every judge should be able to use his or her discretion when setting bonds.

How do you view incarceration — is its purpose more punitive or rehabilitative, and what is the proper balance?

Incarceration can be both punitive and/or rehabilitative. The proper balance depends on the character of the defendant, the nature of the offense, and the need to protect the public. For serious offenses involving individuals with addiction issues, prison might be the best option to punish them for their crimes while also giving them the opportunity to participate in the Department of Corrections' substance abuse treatment programs. Otherwise, those with substance abuse issues complete their incarceration time and are released without any treatment to help them avoid repeating their offenses.

On the other hand, for some more minor offenses, especially if restitution is involved, locking someone up prevents that person from working to earn enough to pay the restitution. Judges must keep communities safe, be good stewards of taxpayer dollars, and provide opportunity, where appropriate, for offenders to turn their lives around.

What sets you apart from your opponents? Why should voters vote for you?

Voters have a clear choice in this race. I am the only candidate with judicial experience. I have a proven track record as a fair, ethical, knowledgeable judge who treats everyone with respect and applies the law as it is written. Voters cannot be sure what kind of judge either of my opponents would be.

I also bring a unique combination of legal and life experiences to my work as a judge. As a mother who now has grandchildren ranging in age from 4-13, I am dedicated to keeping our communities safe and strong. That is why I am working to start a Drug Treatment Court in

Oneida County. Drug Treatment Courts hold offenders accountable, give them a chance to turn their lives around, save taxpayer dollars and help stop the revolving door of crime. I have experience starting a similar program in Vilas County: neither of my opponents has prior experience with drug courts.

This is a non-partisan election and I have broad, bipartisan support. Voters know that I am trustworthy and reliable, that I know Oneida County well, and that I conduct myself with common-sense and honesty. I would be honored to continue serving all the people as the Judge in Oneida County Circuit Court, Branch 1.

Oneida County district attorney Michael Schiek

My name is Michael Schiek and I have decided to run for Oneida County Judge because I want to continue my civil service to Oneida County residents.

I have been practicing law for over 20 years. Within that time, I have been involved in many aspects of the legal system. This includes private practice for the first 10 years of my career.

During this time, I represented hundreds of clients in many types of cases, conducting 18 jury trials; including personal injury, family law, small claims, insurance defense, juveniles, and criminal defense, often accepting appointments from the State Public Defender to represent indigent clients.

My representation for clients required appearances in numerous counties, where I interacted with different court staff, attorneys and judges and observed the judicial process from an objective standpoint. I was able to gain valuable experience with these other jurisdictions that helped shape my career.

I took advantage of an opportunity in 2012 to run for Oneida County district attorney and was elected. I have since been re-elected in 2016 and 2020 and currently hold that position.

As district attorney, I have handled thousands of cases from numerous law enforcement agencies, including over 28 jury trials, complex evidentiary rulings and ne-

gotiated settlements. These cases include, homicides, sexual assaults, battery, thefts, crimes against children, OWIs and many others.

During the course of my current position, I have made many difficult decisions, some unpopular, facing criticism, but I was not swayed by public opinion, rather I based my decision on the law and facts. I would continue this philosophy as judge, interpreting statutes, legal precedent, and apply the facts.

That is the role of a judge, to apply the law to the facts. I have no agenda, no ideologies, this is a non-partisan election. I do not take any position on laws which may be changed or are currently in legislation. I would follow the law as it is. If the law changes, I would comply with those changes.

The attributes of a judge should include neutrality, patience, and respect to the judicial process. All judges are bound by the Code of Judicial Conduct, which can guide judges, when assistance is needed.

Coinciding with my professional career, I was also active within the legal community as a volunteer judge for High School Mock Trial, Past-President of the Tri-County Bar Association, District 9 representative for the Wisconsin Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and member of the State Bar of Wisconsin. I have also been active in the local community, volunteering time.

Additionally, and just as important for experience, I am a veteran, receiving an honorable discharge after four years in the United States Marine Corps, where I served with marines from all over the United States and was deployed throughout the world. I am a husband and father of two daughters.

I enjoy everything Oneida County has to offer and would like to keep it a safe place to enjoy and raise a family.

The diversity of my life and legal career, through professional, military and personal experience, sets me apart from other candidates.

Additional information can be found at Schiek for Oneida County Judge Facebook page.