

## FLY OVER: Lt. Col. Daniel Schone sends message of gratitude to hometown of Amery P18

### Amery faces additional challenges with police staffing

BY APRIL ZIEMER  
EDITOR@THEAMERYFREEPRESS.COM

A major issue the City of Amery is facing is how to run a community with fewer police officers. In a job like no other, on any given

day, they can be everything from crisis managers to social workers to ticket writers and more. Even one shortage can be felt in a small community.



Bjorklund

Many places, but law enforcement especially, are facing challenges filling job openings. Wisconsin Law Enforcement Network (WILENET) is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Justice. Not all municipalities advertise law enforcement employment opportunities on the site, but of those who do, there are currently 202 jobs available across the state with a wide range of pay and benefits. Agencies across the state are upping the ante to get officers.

In the past handful of months, the city has lost several employees from the police department. Three

SEE CITY, PAGE 14

### Touching sendoff planned for the best of the best

BY APRIL ZIEMER  
EDITOR@THEAMERYFREEPRESS.COM

This weekend a group of women will gather for a special ceremony to pay tribute to the life of a nurse. It is what they do as part of the Wisconsin Nurses Honor Guard, honor those who have dedicated their lives to the profession of nursing-but this time is different because it is for one of their own.

Marjean Rown, Mary Marschall, Renee Dau and Cynthia Miller are part

of the Wisconsin Nurses Honor Guard (WNHG), which recognizes nurses at the time of their passing.

While the WNHG has been in the state for a bit, the Northwest Wisconsin group is just taking off. These ladies, along with Amy Stiver and Kay Kissinger Wolf are looking for more nurses to join in this part of the state. Before this group, nurses from the southern part of the state would drive



APRIL ZIEMER | AMERY FREE PRESS

Renee Dau, Mary Marschall, Cynthia Miller and Marjean Rown are proud to honor nurses.

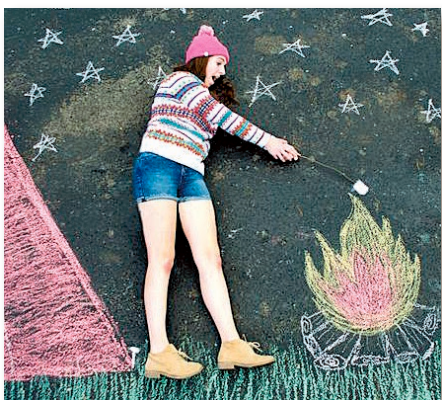
SEE NURSES, PAGE 18



CONTRIBUTED

### Adventure awaits for students because of teacher's 'cool' summer vacation

From Amery to Alaska and back home again, local Fourth Grade educators take a grant allowing summer vacation of a lifetime, which will bring the 49th state alive in classrooms this fall. See story on page 2.



CONTRIBUTED  
There is still time to sign up to show off our chalk skills.

## 1st Annual Port Valhalla Chalk Fest calls for 'artists of all ages'

BY NICK HAHN  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The lakeside blacktop of Amery's Port Valhalla on Pike Lake will soon be plastered with pastels of

community creativity. Campground owner Dena Babcock, as well as event organizers Desiree Passe and Casey Miller, will be hosting the 1st annual Port Valhalla "Chalk Fest" July 15th. From morning until early

afternoon, participants will use chalk to decorate their own section of blacktop canvas. Artists of all skill levels and ages are encouraged

SEE CHALK, PAGE 11

# THE LAW FIRM OF WILLIAMS & DAVIS

314 Keller Avenue North - Amery

www.wisconsintriallaw.com    715-268-8901    inquiry@wistriallaw.com

**CRIMINAL - TRAFFIC - OWI - PERSONAL INJURY - BANKRUPTCY\***

\*We are a debt relief agency. We help people file for financial relief under Chapter 7 of the Bankruptcy Code.



NEWS  
715-268-8101  
editor@theameryfreepress.com

ADVERTISING/PUBLIC NOTICES  
715-268-8101  
marketing@theameryfreepress.com

EMPLOYMENT ADS  
715-557-1722  
classifieds@theameryfreepress.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS  
715-268-8101  
dstangl@theameryfreepress.com

**CONTACT US**

**We love to hear from our subscribers, advertisers and readers. Here are the many ways you can contact us:**

**Mail:**  
Amery Free Press  
P.O. Box 424  
Amery, WI 54001

**Phone:** 715-268-8101  
**FAX:** 715-268-5300

**Email:**  
**Tom Stangl, Publisher**  
tstangl@theameryfreepress.com  
**April Ziemer, Editor**  
editor@theameryfreepress.com  
**Advertising**  
marketing@theameryfreepress.com  
**Diane Stangl, Office Manager**  
dstangl@theameryfreepress.com  
**Sue VanBuskirk, Employment Ads**  
classifieds@theameryfreepress.com  
**Nicole Gagner, Graphic Design**  
ngagner@theameryfreepress.com  
**Rebecca LaMar, Graphic Design**  
design@burnettcountysentinel.com

**Our office is located at:**  
215 Keller Ave. S.  
Amery, Wisconsin 54001

**Hours:**  
Monday - Friday  
8:00 am to 4:30 pm

# CITY: Letter from former officer claimed they never wanted to leave

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

members of the department led ethics complaints earlier this year; one against Mayor Chad Leonard and a second against City Administrator Patty Bjorklund.

The Free Press has obtained a copy of the complaint against Bjorklund dated January 29, 2023. It was led based on City of Amery Personnel Policy Violation 12.5 which states, "It will be a violation of the policies for any employee or member of the City Council to interfere with, threaten, coerce, restrain, discharge, retaliate against or otherwise discriminate against any employee or other person because he/she has le[d] a complaint or given testimony in connection with a grievance, complaint or an appeal."

According to the complaint, January 27, 2023, Interim Chief Jason Hickok advised Bjorklund he wanted to make her aware he would do everything under his ability to properly train in the new incoming police chief who was to start working at the Amery Police Department Monday, January 30, 2023.

Allegedly, upon Hickok advising her of his intent, Bjorklund shifted the conversation topic and verbally told Hickok she wished Hickok along with Administrative Office Manager Heather Hegerty, and Administrative Assistant Bethany Eskro would drop the formal ethics complaint they had just led with the City of Amery Ethics Board the previous day (against Mayor Chad Leonard).

According to the complaint, Bjorklund advised she "wasn't able to sleep the previous evening due to the ethics complaint that had been led and advised she woke up in the middle of the night with a heart rate over 160 beats per minute."

Allegedly, Bjorklund indicated the complaint was "a very big deal" and the complaint would "make the City of Amery look bad." She also advised "it would make the City Council look bad, that it would make the City Mayor look bad and it would make her look bad." She also indicated that "it would look bad for the individuals who led the complaint" and again expressed her desire for the three to drop or withdraw the ethics complaint.

**The police department having officers to respond to critical situations affects the quality of life in a community.**

going before the ethics committee. Allegedly, she also indicated this complaint "would blow up in the community if it got out to the public" and she advised she had received an anonymous message the other day from a subject who had called and left a message regarding the background of in-coming Chief Hainzl.

The complaint states Hickok advised he would speak with the other two individuals regarding the ethics complaint and get back to Bjorklund. Allegedly, Hickok did contact Hegerty and Eskro regarding Bjorklund's proposal to withdraw the ethics complaint and the consensus was to not withdrawal but continue.

No action was taken by the council on either complaint.

In the time since the ethics complaints, there have been allegations of harassment. Eskro was relieved of her duties by Hainzl and reinstated by the city council after a public hearing. An array of videos of an interrogation of Eskro by Hainzl and her hearing in front of the council have received over 175,000 views online, bringing a great deal of attention to the City of Amery.

A resignation letter to the city from a former officer claimed they never wanted to leave the Amery Police Department but felt working at the department had become "a hostile environment."

According to the letter, they felt threats had been made toward some members of their department and that some people in City Administration had become, "aggressive and toxic in nature," with several people in the police department, which at one time, "had an extremely strong and cohesive team."

They also felt neither the Amery Police Department nor the City of Amery Employee Handbook were being followed.

Problems average police departments face are law enforcement as a whole faces a lot of scrutiny, many work long hours and face burn out and deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The job is also dangerous — in Western Wisconsin alone this spring three officers were killed in the line of duty.

With fewer officers, Amery may be facing existing staff working longer hours to cover shifts. The city may need to contract with other agencies or Polk County to cover shifts. Regardless of what goes on within City Hall or the police department, having officers to respond to critical situations affects the quality of life in a community.

# It's almost here!

## Voting begins July 12!

Eating & Drinking

Sports & Recreation

Health & Fitness

Shopping

Arts & Entertainment

Local

Services



*Scan Here to Vote*



**VOTING ROUND: Wed., July 12 at 9 a.m. – Sun., August 6 at 5 p.m.**

**WINNERS ANNOUNCED: October 4**

**www.theameryfreepress.com/bestof**