

COACH OF THE YEAR: Congratulations to Amery golf coach Bill Peterson on his award P16



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Amery Hospital & Clinic opens new Chemo Infusion Center

A project made possible through generous philanthropic donations, sees Amery Hospital & Clinic's newest project ready to show to the public. "With continued gratitude for your support, we are pleased to invite you to attend an Open House of our newly opened, remodeled and expanded Chemo Infusion Center at Amery Hospital & Clinic July 13, 2023, beginning at 3:30 p.m. Please come to the front entrance and we will direct you to our ABC Conference Room for a brief program. After the program, we will host guided tours through the newly opened Chemo Infusion Center. We are grateful for your support that has made this project possible, and we look forward to welcoming you to tour this beautiful new and healing patient space at Amery Hospital & Clinic."

Pictured at the recent ribbon cutting are L-R: AHC Foundation Board member Jon Buss, AHC Board President Jim Leadholm, HealthPartners Project Manager Kris Thomas, RN Chemo Nurse Manager Cathleen McGinnity, AHC Foundation Board Chair Joyce Schaefer, AHC Foundation Director Lisa Ruehlow, CEO & President of Amery Hospital & Clinic Deb Rudquist.

Retirement, resignation and releases: What is next for Amery?

BY APRIL ZIEMER
EDITOR@THEAMERYFREEPRESS.COM

The City of Amery will have a few people temporarily steering the ship as they navigate their way out of rough waters that have seen a week including the retirement of Police Chief Steven Hainzl, resignation of Mayor Chad Leonard and many press releases keeping up with the ever changing matters at Amery City Hall.

Mayor Kipp Harris has been named Mayor in Charge until



Leonard



Hainzl

a new Chief of Police is hired and Eric Elkin will serve as Amery's Mayor until a spring election.

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Best of voting underway

The polls are open. The fourth annual Best of the Amery Area contest is now accepting votes at <http://www.theameryfreepress.com/bestof>.

Readers of the Amery Free Press have nominated business and individuals in seven categories: eating and drinking, sports and recreation, health and fitness, shopping,

arts and entertainment, local and services. The ballot contains the top 5 entries that received the most nominations. Nearly all categories have nominees.

Voting begins at 9 a.m. July 12 and runs through 5 p.m. Sunday, August 6. Voters can

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'Come on down!' You could be the next contestant on Amery's Price is Right

BY CORA WATERMAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You hear your name, and you eagerly run down to the aisle to the large stage where you correctly come closest to the retail price without going over and win big! How many times have you watched this happen to other people on television, playing along and knowing

that you would've won had it been you playing?

Well, an opportunity will soon present itself and you could have the chance to prove yourself worthy of winning cash prizes, furniture, electronics, a trip, or even a new car!

On the evening of August 12, a version of the popular game show "The Price is Right" will be here in

Amery, Wisconsin- wheel and all- and you, your friends, your family, and anybody else you care to invite that Saturday will have the opportunity to play and win real prizes like the ones you've seen given out on T.V. and your chances of getting called up is completely up to you.

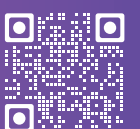
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CITY: 'Nowhere in my policy does it state I must go through H.R. to fire someone'

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After a closed session citing the topics of mayor and police chief lasted over an hour Wednesday, July 5, 2023, the Amery City Council reconvened in open session where one motion was made-to begin the process of hiring a new Chief of Police.

This came after Hainzl turned in a letter of retirement to the city, where he claimed to have turned in his equipment July 3, 2023 and stated he would use vacation days until his official day of July 10, 2023.

The motion came from council member Rick Van Blaricom and was seconded by council member Mike Manor, it passed unanimously.

Hainzl's retirement came after the City of Amery began receiving numerous messages of criticism in writing, by phone and online. Various YouTube videos concerning the City of Amery have reached over one million views.

"I had the best intentions for this department and wanted to stay for a very long time. That was cut short due to the intolerable conditions that I tried to overcome and look past during my time here. I was faced constantly with blatant disrespect, whispering, dirty looks, and glaring from the eyes," Hainzl said in his retirement letter, "This thought-out mutiny has gone on for over 5 months. Before I was sworn in, attempts were made to twist my wife's bikini modeling career into something notorious to fit their scheming narrative."

According to Hainzl's letter, attempts to stir the community against him were made at the very beginning and end of his tenure.

"Citations were legally given to subjects, but now many believe were done to commit mass anger, controversy, and rejection towards me. They targeted a service provider as well as the elderly. Again, they were legally justified, but I believe the intentions were clear. These were attempts to turn the Amery community against me, right from the start. Not one explanation or conversation was initiated by my subordinates regarding these citations," he said.

He alleges he had told everyone multiple times about his issues, and nothing was done about it.

Hainzl said, "My 28-year law enforcement reputation is completely under attack nationally because this incident spiraled out of control, due to the council fearing a lawsuit, and using feelings instead of facts to make a decision. This has now gained national attention for Amery in a negative light."

Regarding his firing of Bethany Eskro, Hainzl said, "Nowhere in my department policy does it state that I must go through H.R. to fire someone, although that was brought up at an open session meeting that I should have done that. Those words, along with many others, created false information about how the incident should have been handled. I was hired to change the culture of the department. I guess Amery does not want to get rid of the 'Good Ole Boy' system."

After the Amery Free Press announced Hainzl's retirement in a story posted online the night of July 5, Editor April Ziemer received late night communications from the former Chief (still using the City of Amery email address).

"I really thought you were better than that," Hainzl said, "You say you are the pillar that holds up the city. I guess that doesn't include people who aren't from Amery. Letting me have my say isn't the status quo in Amery, but it would be the right thing to do."

Hainzl's wife, Anne, then uploaded online content shaming Ziemer for not printing the entire retirement letter, and the letter itself, which was loaded with accusations.

A July 6, 2023 amended press release from City Administrator Patty Bjorklund said, "On Monday – July 3rd, 2023 in the afternoon, I received a retirement letter from Police Chief Steven Hainzl. Police Chief Steven Hainzl is no longer employed with the City of Amery effective immediately."

Bjorklund said the City had been notified the retirement letter from Hainzl had made its way to social media. She said, "Please note that these accusations and opinions are in no way a reflection of the City of Amery as a whole, to include the Amery Police Department. We sincerely apologize that social media has become such a toxic outlet for the recent happenings within the City Center. It is our hope that we will move on from this disheartening period as a stronger organization for our taxpayers and the public overall."

In a separate release Bjorklund shared the Amery Police Department will be moving forward temporarily as a Police Department without an Acting Chief.

"This in no way means that the Amery Police Department does not have coverage. We are taking steps to ensure that the public has coverage. Officer, Kipp Harris is the Officer in Charge."

Harris said, "It is an honor to be asked to be Officer in Charge. It is a welcomed challenge and I have much to learn, but I am happy and grateful for the opportunity to lead this department."

Bjorklund said the city is in the process of advertising for a new Police Chief for the Amery Police Department. "We hope that process moves swiftly and that the public obtains the best candidate for the position. We have also been advertising for the Police Officer position for the Amery Police Department as well.

If anyone is interested in applying, they can go to WILENET to apply for either position," said Bjorklund. She also said both positions can be found on the city's website.

Although yet another release from Bjorklund that day said, "July 6th, 2023 in the afternoon, I received a Resignation Letter from Mayor Chad Leonard," he had actually sent an email early Thursday morning to members of the city council, City Administrator Patty Bjorklund and the Amery Free Press.

Bjorklund's release went on to say, "Mayor Chad Leonard, will no longer serve on the Common Council effective immediately. For the remainder of Chad Leonard's term, Eric Elkin will serve as Acting Mayor for the City of Amery Common Council."

City code says, "during the absence or inability of the Mayor, shall have the powers and duties of the Mayor, except that he/she shall not have power to approve an act of the Council which the Mayor has disapproved by filing objections with the City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer. He/she shall, when so officiating, be styled 'Acting Mayor.'"

Leonard's resignation email said the following:

"It is with great regret that I tender my resignation as the Mayor of the City of Amery, effective immediately.

"I have long advocated for responsible governance, and I am proud that during my tenure, we have adopted measures that make governing much more collaborative. What is disappointing, however, is that we are operating in a climate where the loudest voices are not being used for the good of the Community, but rather to pillory anyone who conflicts with their agenda. Addressing these forces openly and honestly is exhausting, and frankly, no longer worth the effort."



Harris



Elkin

"My resignation may be viewed as a victory by some, and to them, I wish them nothing but the best — but at the end of the day, it is the City that suffers, because if ever there was a deterrent to serving in public office, this is it."

Leonard was elected to a two-year term as mayor in 2022 after running unopposed. He had served on the city council for three years before after being appointed to the council by then Mayor Paul Isakson to fill the seat left vacant by the resignation of Rick Davis.

In a 2022 interview with the Amery Free Press, Leonard said he ran for Mayor because he wanted to be a positive influence on the city of Amery. "I believe that I am a good listener and a person that approaches problems with an open mind which allows for an inclusive solution. I am sure that I will make decisions that not everyone will be happy with, but I do commit to explaining my rationale for the decision," Leonard said, "I didn't get into City government to make big changes, but rather to ensure that everyone has a voice."

An ethics complaint was filed in January concerning Leonard, which stated city employees brought a concern forward from a city resident about Hainzl, and they felt it was not handled properly. "It was our duty to report this matter of public interest to the City Administration. It was Mayor Leonard's duty to take the matter seriously, give it due diligence, and ultimately to uphold the policies of the City of Amery for the benefit of the public that we all serve," the complaint said. They also cited Leonard was not transparent to the Amery City Council as to the extent and content of the resident's concern.

The council held two closed sessions regarding the mayor, the last occurring July 5.

The last time a mayor resigned from the City of Amery was April 4, 1973. Mayor George Griffin resigned citing health considerations in his statement accompanying his resignation letter. Griffin served the city for 11 years as mayor with his term due to expire in April of 1974.

On a motion made by James Brackin, the council accepted Griffin's resignation with regret.

The previous fall the mayor was hospitalized with a stomach ulcer condition.

Griffin said, "I have enjoyed working with you fellows and I love Amery, but I have to give up something before I am forced to give up everything," continued the mayor. "I will continue to work for Amery and take part in civic affairs, but not as mayor or a member of the council."

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