



Rice Lake driver killed in rollover

One person was reported killed and one was injured in a one-vehicle rollover Friday night, April 28, at a rural location south of Turtle Lake, according to the Barron County Sheriff's Department.

The driver, Brenden Brown, 21, of Rice Lake was pronounced deceased at the scene. The passenger, Gretchen Madsen, 18, of Clayton was transported to Barron Hospital with minor injuries.

An investigation of the crash shows the vehicle was traveling west on County Road D/7th Avenue at a high rate of speed and failed to stop at the sign. The vehicle continued west with the driver subsequently losing control and leaving the roadway. The vehicle struck a tree and the driver was ejected from the vehicle.

Reports indicate the first 911 call was made shortly after 10 p.m. Friday at a listed address of 187 Seventh Ave., Clayton. Seventh Avenue is also County Hwy. D, and the crash location is near the intersection of county highways D and K, about five miles south of Turtle Lake.

Dispatchers were told that the vehicle was on fire, but that the fire was put out minutes later.

The deputy later reported that the male was deceased.

By 5:30 a.m. Saturday, April 29, dispatchers were told that the driver's family had been notified.

Speed is believed to be a contributing factor in the crash.

The crash remains under investigation by the Barron County Sheriff's Department.



Highway Shop is history — Crews from Erickson Excavating completed the demolition of the former Barron County Highway Department shop this past week. The old shop was designed by E.F. Klinger and Associates, of Eau Claire, and constructed in 1947 on the east side of Hwy. 25 by Peterson Construction Co., of Minneapolis, at a cost of \$191,000. Citing needs for modernization and more space, Barron County elected in 2021 to build a much larger shop and other buildings. During that process, it was discovered that the 1947 highway shop was flagged as eligible for Register of Historic Places in 2011 by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. The discovery delayed the project and contributed to the cost rising from an estimated \$25 million to \$30 million. Once the debris is cleared, the area will be used mainly for parking. There will also be a sign and display recognizing the history of the shop that stood before.
Photo by Ryan Urban



Crashed vehicle—Pictured is the car involved in a rollover crash Friday night. The driver was ejected and later died while a passenger sustained minor injuries.

Heightened attention to violent incidents

Officers' deaths a raw memory

By Bob Zientara

It was the evening of Monday, April 17, 2023 — just a week after the tragic deaths of two Barron County municipal police officers — when a woman called 911 to report that she was following a “suicidal and homicidal” man in a vehicle moving through the city of Barron.

Dispatchers learned that the man might be armed and had allegedly threatened to shoot police. Both the suspect vehicle and the caller left town on Wisconsin Hwy. 25, heading north.

During the next 90 minutes, officers from multiple departments were involved as the incident progressed. A call went out from Barron County dispatchers to surrounding counties, saying that law enforcement officers should be concerned for their safety.

The incident was to end peacefully, as contact was established with the suspect, who alleged he wasn't suicidal and, even more to the point, he didn't have a gun with him.

Rice Lake police officers made contact with the man at a city park later that evening, and he was eventually taken to an Eau Claire facility for examination and treatment.

As people wait for the results of a Wisconsin Department of Justice investigation into the April 8 shootings of officers Hunter Scheel and Emily Breidenbach, incidents like the one on April 17 have taken on a heightened meaning. Both the law enforcement community and the public are waiting for hard information and real evidence — which leads to inevitable speculation.

What happened on April 8, why did it happen, and could there have been another outcome?

While there are differences between the events of April 8 and 17, there are several important common denomi-

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nators: the real (or suspected) presence of weapons and the potential for violence.

One added ingredient for Barron County is the presence of a “mental health co-responder,” who can accompany law enforcement on calls involving the possibility of armed violence.

Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald cautioned the public that “these (kinds of) calls have always existed in the county — we have been going out on them (for what seems like) forever.

“I think people are paying more attention to (these incidents) after the death of Emily and Hunter, and that is good,” he added.

“We have added equipment and programs, like the (mental health)

co-responders to help in any way that we can,” Fitzgerald added.

Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Annette Ziegler held a mental health Summit in Madison on April 21, noted 75th Dist. State Rep. Dave Armstrong, R-Rice Lake.

“I believe a number of individuals from Barron County and the Rice Lake Chief of Police attended,” Armstrong said.

“I met with Representative Dora Drake, who attended, to discuss (the seminar) and will be meeting with Senator Jesse James, who also attended, to further discuss the summit (and) to see what changes can be made to assist those with mental health issues and law enforcement,” Armstrong said.

Stacey Frolik, director of the Barron County Department of Health and Human Services, said that the co-responder's position hasn't been in effect long enough to determine its results. However, at least on an anecdotal level, it seems to be working, she added.

“I believe funding and legislative changes will help,” Frolik said.

But there needs to be more collaboration statewide, she added.

“No one county can make the drastic system changes needed, especially not a small rural county like Barron,” Frolik said.

Barron County officials who attended the mental health summit included Frolik and Ann Hay, of the Health and Human Services department, Circuit Court Judge Jim Babler, and Rice Lake Police Chief Steve Roux.

“We heard of models in Dade County Florida and Arizona's state model,” Frolik added.

“Both models took over 20 years to (develop),” she said.

“Our local team will be meeting in the near future to discuss what we learned.”

In the meantime, the investigation into the April 8 incident is under the direction of Attorney Gen. Josh Kaul. His office did not respond to a request for comment as of May 1.

Kaul has ties to Barron County. When he was running for office in 2018, he said that when he was a child, his father, Raj Kaul, was employed at what was then known as Jerome Foods in Barron.

Kaul said he came to visit his father between the time he was about 8 years old until he graduated from high school.

Completed Department of Justice investigations can be found on the DOJ critical incident website: <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/dci/officer-involved-critical-incident>

Hwy 8 getting to be a challenging drive

By Bob Zientara

Drivers who use U.S. Hwy. 8 in eastern Barron County need to be careful when using a stretch of road between County Hwy. M and the Rusk County line.

Dump trucks use the road on a daily basis between the Source Energy sand mine, town of Sumner, and a transloading facility about 15 miles to the east at Weyerhaeuser.

Each fully-loaded sand truck can weigh up to 73,000, according to Barron County Highway Commissioner Mark Servi.

However, Wisconsin Department of Transportation documents say that this stretch of Hwy. 8 isn't scheduled for resurfacing until March 2027 — which could mean that motorists will encounter deteriorated highway conditions for up to the next four years.

While the wait may be frustrating, it doesn't mean that the trucks that use Hwy. 8 aren't paying their share of costs to maintain or resurface the roadway.

According to the Federal Department of Transportation, owners of big trucks are paying into the system in two ways: The heavy vehicle use tax or HVUT, and federal fuel taxes paid at the pump.

According to the federal DOT, the HVUT is assessed each year on vehicles that weigh over 55,000 pounds and use federal highways.

If the gross taxable weight is from 55,000 to 75,000 pounds, the

HVUT is \$100, plus \$22 per 1,000 pounds over 55,000 pounds. For over 75,000-pound vehicles, the maximum HVUT is \$550 per year.

In addition to the state fuel taxes, there is a federal tax of 18.4¢ per gallon imposed on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon on diesel fuel.

However, local and state sources say that there's no formal relationship between the money generated by trucks that use Hwy. 8, and the specific stretches of roadway on which they drive.

By contrast, sand mining companies that use Barron County roads are paying Barron County each year to cover annual maintenance and resurfacing costs (see infographic).

“Each of our existing road agreements that sand companies continue to utilize are actively enforced,” John Muench, county corporation counsel, said Friday, April 28.

“When sand companies sell or otherwise transfer existing sand mines, we transfer the road agreement to the new owner or operator,” he added. The companies “must accept that agreement or enter into a new agreement before they can utilize the (county) highway for hauling sand.”

When the frac sand boom started a decade ago, Barron County looked at what other counties were doing in terms of recovering highway maintenance and resurfacing costs, Muench said.

(See Hwy 8 page 12A)

Sand company contracts with Barron County Highway P, towns of Arland/Clinton

Company	Annual tons	Per ton/total*	Construction **
EOG	500,000	35 cents/\$175,000	\$1 million
Superior	1.2 million	12 cents/\$1.44 million	\$2.35 million
Midwest Frac	700,000	85 cents/\$595,000	\$1.35 million

* Per ton/total: The company agreed to pay a fee per ton for ongoing road repairs. The payments will stop when the amount reaches the total listed. If the county withdraws funds for road repairs, the payments will resume until the total is replenished.

** Construction: The company agreed to pay the listed amount as its share of costs for the reconstruction and resurfacing of about eight miles of County Highway P in the towns of Arland and Clinton.

Source: Barron County Highway Department



Roadside tribute -- Police officers Emily Breidenbach and Hunter Scheel are honored in this display alongside County Hwy. SS at Cameron.
Photo by Bob Zientara



Heavy road use — U.S. Hwy. 8 is showing a lot of wear in the eastern part of Barron County, where trucks and other traffic have worn large holes in the pavement. This photo was taken Monday, May 1, 2023, near Hwy. 8 and 27th Street in the town of Sumner.
Photo by Bob Zientara