

POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

FALL 2021



The “residential side” of the Red River Valley Juvenile Center had to be completely stripped after being damaged by a May 14 rain storm that occurred while the roof was in the process of being replaced.

Water came in when roof was being replaced

Rainstorm damaged Juvenile Center

During a summer of devastating drought conditions, the Red River Valley Juvenile Center received extensive water damage from a pop-up rainstorm that occurred on May 14.

While the size of the storm was small according to radar images, the storm produced significant rain (approximately 1.5”) in a short period of time over a small geographic area. A rain event of this nature is not especially significant, however, a rain event during a roofing project with a large section of roof completely exposed is a problem.

Large quantities of rainwater inundated the residential living unit of the Red River Valley Juvenile Center (RRVJC) along with the electrical equipment room. Water entering the electrical equipment room, which contains electronic security equipment, through the exposed roof resulted in locks cycling for no reason and camera systems short-circuiting. The entire RRVJC was determined to be uninhabitable and emergency evacuation plans were implemented to move all residents to alternative housing locations in Bemidji.

The true scope of the water damage was not fully understood until a clean-up crew was brought in and began measuring moisture levels of wall coverings and ceiling materials. Nearly every wall and ceiling panel within the residential side of the facility tested at very high levels of moisture and needed to be removed.

What was originally believed to be a temporary (although significant) inconvenience has quickly become a major problem that will result in long-term disruption to the operations of the RRVJC.

See CENTER, Page 2

State pays bill for Enbridge refunds

Patience, persistence and common sense seems to have prevailed in the long tenured Enbridge Energy property tax valuation contest that goes back to 2013’s property tax payments.

With help from Senator Mark Johnson and Representative Deb Kiel, along with several other northern Minnesota legislators and the Walz administration, the State of Minnesota approved grants to the 13 northern Minnesota counties that faced over \$30 million in property tax refunds to Enbridge Energy going back to 2013.

Polk County received \$1,166,654 to “refund” Enbridge for property taxes determined by tax courts to have been overpaid by Enbridge during this time. Needless to say, that amount of money would be a significant sting to Polk County if we had, to pay it directly without state help.

For a little background, utilities and railroads get their properties valued by the Minnesota Department of Revenue, not Polk County. The county receives the value from

See ENBRIDGE, Page 2

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Refund legislation

LOCAL GOVERNMENT GRANTS.

(a) \$29,354,688 in fiscal year 2022 only is appropriated from the general fund to the commissioner of revenue for grants to counties identified in this section to pay a portion of the refund to a taxpayer under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 271, or Minnesota Statutes, section 278.12, for a final judgment that is the result of an appeal filed by a fluid pipeline company under Minnesota Statutes, section 273.372, based on assessment years 2012 through 2018. These grants must be used by each county to pay refund amounts owed by the county and other taxing districts within the county. The grants are exempt from the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, and must be paid to the counties by August 15, 2021, and allocated as follows:

- (1) \$91,781 to Aitkin County;
- (2) \$2,225,319 to Beltrami County;
- (3) \$2,573,615 to Carlton County;
- (4) \$2,631,052 to Cass County;
- (5) \$3,690,961 to Clearwater County;
- (6) \$549,582 to Hubbard County;
- (7) \$5,591,840 to Itasca County;
- (8) \$1,189,765 to Kittson County;
- (9) \$2,404,267 to Marshall County;
- (10) \$2,551,225 to Pennington County;
- (11) **\$1,166,654 to Polk County;**
- (12) \$1,904,685 to Red Lake County; and
- (13) \$2,783,942 to Saint Louis County.

(b) The appropriation under this section is one time.

Enbridge tax refund

Continued from Page 1

DOR each year and includes it amongst all the rest of the county's assessed properties.

Once the county, cities, school districts and townships determine their annual property tax levies, those levies get spread against the values of each property. You see this for your own properties on your tax statement each year. Enbridge is Polk County's highest valued property and therefore our highest property taxpayer.

As is their right, they contested the valuation of their property for most of the years since 2013 in tax court but they paid their property taxes each year. After many court rulings and appeals, the final ruling determined that Enbridge's properties had been overvalued by DOR and therefore the property taxes they had paid for most of these past eight years were too high and they were entitled to a refund.

Statutes also call for 4% interest to be paid on those refunds which really upped the amount

due back to Enbridge. Unlike most properties, the amount is so high that many of the counties faced very difficult decisions if they had to pay these refunds directly back to Enbridge. With the final resolution to the court case, the legislature was able to determine amounts to grant to each county to refund these exorbitant amounts.

Our hope is that we will not see these issues creep up again. The problem isn't so much the amount, it is the accumulation of multiple years of property tax payments and accrued interest that after all these years leads to such high amounts.

For some perspective, the amount refunded to Enbridge is well over the county's annual total increase in the property tax levy. It is our hope that future property valuation contests are resolved within the tax year so that such refunds never get to accumulate the way these did while waiting for a final court decision. — **Chuck Whiting, Polk County administrator**

Center

Continued from Page 1

While the disruption to RRVJC operations has been frustrating, I am optimistic that the required renovation will allow for improvements to the facility that will serve both the staff and the adolescents of our communities for years in the future.

Revisions to the existing floor plan will allow many issues, such as blind spots, lack of meeting space and poorly designed staff office space to be significantly improved upon along with the creation of an observation room for adolescents who need additional monitoring. While definitive time frames for completion of this project have not yet been established, it is anticipated that the residential side of the RRVJC will likely not reopen until the middle of 2022. — **Andrew Larson, executive director Tri-County Corrections**

Juvenile Center to close for rebuild

The Regional Corrections Board for Tri-County Community Corrections voted unanimously on Sept. 27 to temporarily close the Secure Detention side of the Red River Valley Juvenile Center (RRVJC) until the reconstruction of the Non-Secure Detention side of the facility nears completion in 2022.

The decision to temporarily close the entire RRVJC was made during a special meeting of the Regional Corrections Board. The Corrections Board took several factors into consideration before ultimately deciding to temporarily close the RRVJC.

- The anticipated reconstruction time frame of the Non-Secure Detention (Residential) side of the facility is much longer than originally anticipated and includes many unknowns which could delay construction even further. Todd Blixt with ICON Architecture spoke with the board about product shortages ranging from blue junction boxes to Styrofoam panels in addition to long-term delays of 26 weeks or more for air-handling units, all of which will impact construction time frames.

- Reduced staffing options have been implemented since the Secure Detention side of the facility reopened in July. However, even with the reduced staffing, which is in place, the staffing costs required

to operate the Secure Detention side are significant. Even with reduced staffing in place, the RRVJC must continue to operate with two-staff on duty, 24 hours/day to allow for cross-gender supervision and to ensure safety within a secure detention environment is maintained.

- The lack of a non-secure detention environment would potentially result in prolonged secure detention placements. Data shows that prolonged detention for adolescents can be detrimental to their mental and physical well-being. With the non-secure detention side of the facility closed for reconstruction, the ability to transition adolescents into a less-restrictive setting is negatively impacted at the RRVJC. The prolonged housing of adolescents in a secure detention setting would have a detrimental effect on local adolescents but would also reduce placements from non-member counties.

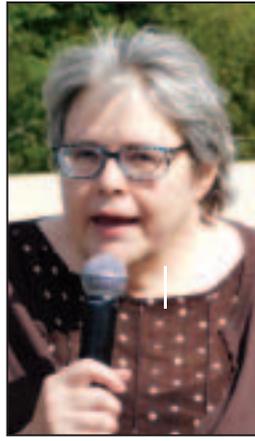
Once the RRVJC is temporarily closed beginning on Monday, Oct. 11, efforts will be made to find alternative employment options for RRVJC staff within the adult jail and probation department. Temporary employment within Tri-County will help to ensure that the years of experience of juvenile center staff are available when the RRVJC re-opens in full later in 2022.



Melissa Hortman



Margaret Anderson-Kelliher



Heidi Rahe



Roger Moe



Deb Kiel

Bridge named for longtime engineer Bernie Lieder

Bernie L Lieder Memorial Bridge, that's what a sign now says as motorists when traveling County State Aid Highway 11 about 7 miles east of Crookston approach the bridge over the Red Lake River.

The bridge name was established by resolution of the Polk County Board of Commissioners at their board meeting on Sept 7 with the sign unveiled at a ceremony at the west end of the bridge that afternoon.

Among those in attendance were Bernie's three daughters and sons-in-law: Sue and Mark Dundas, Wells, Minn.; Heidi and John Rahe, Rensselaer, Ind.; and Jane and Ken Whitter, Coquitlam, BC, Canada.

Participating in the ceremony were: State Rep. Melissa Hortmann, the speaker of the house; State Transportation Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher; State Rep. Deb Kiel; past State Sen. Roger Moe; County Board Chair Gerald Jacobson; and Polk County Engineer Richard Sanders. Heidi Rahe offered remarks from the family.

The renaming action was initiated by Sanders, who brought the resolution to the County Board asking approval for renaming what has been known as the Gentilly Bridge to the Bernie L. Lieder Bridge.

Sanders said the reason behind renaming of the bridge was that "Bernie was known by many nationwide because



of all the transportation issues he dealt with and studied. In thinking about his whole legacy and what he did for Polk County, the state of Minnesota, and nationwide, I felt it only right he be honored by renaming a bridge he constructed after himself."

Lieder, who died on Sunday, Aug. 23, 2020, at the age of 97, served as Polk County engineer for 37 years (1947-1984). After his retirement

from the county, he served as a state representative from Minnesota District 2 for 26 years (1984-2010).

Born Feb. 19, 1923, near Rockford, Minn., he graduated from Rockford High School in 1940. After studying at the University of Illinois and Purdue University, where he earned his engineering degree, Lieder served with 102nd Infantry Division Oaks in the European theater of World War

II (1943-46).

At the end of the war with his fluent ability to speak German, Lieder served as a translator during the liberation of German towns and camps. It was during that time that he witnessed the gruesome scene where retreating Germans had burned a barn while it still contained some 1,000 prisoners.

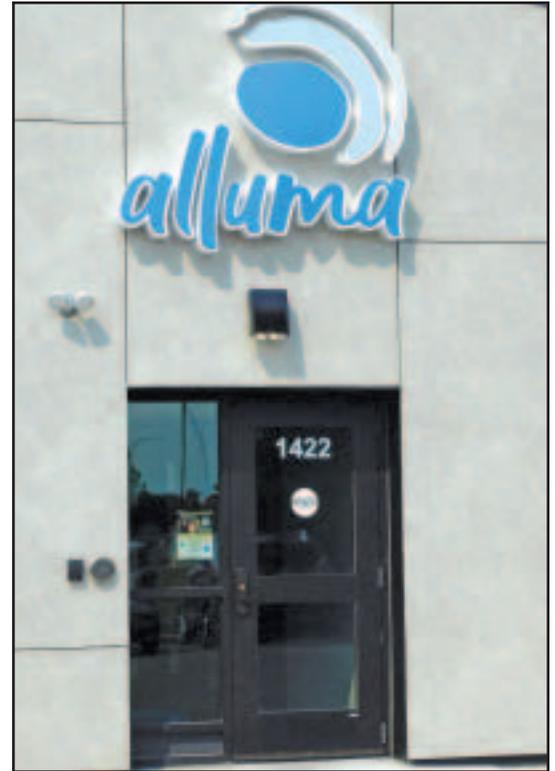
Lieder was the last World War II veteran to serve in the Minnesota State Legislature. His experiences are archived in the Greatest Generation exhibit at the Minnesota Historical Center. Lieder spent many years in the Army Reserves.

As Polk County engineer, Lieder developed and oversaw much of the county's infrastructure of roads and bridges. He was involved with many county, state and national transportation organizations often in leadership roles.

During his time in the legislature, Lieder was always a key source on transportation issues, regularly serving as chair of transportation committees and always as a key member whether or not his party was in political control. He also served on General Legislation, Agriculture, Rural Economics, Veterans Affairs, Elections, Capital Investment, Finance Division, Transit, and oversight committees, many of which he chaired.



Alluma in Crookston



Alluma in East Grand Forks

Wellbeing remains the focal point

Alluma is new name for Northwestern Mental Health Center

On July 1, 2021, Northwestern Mental Health Center announced its name change to Alluma™. The nonprofit mental and chemical health provider, under its new name, is evolving to meet the growing needs of the community.

"Our former name served us well for nearly 60 years. But it caused confusion and didn't accurately depict the reach of our services," said Alluma CEO Shauna Reitmeier. "Our community needs and the area we serve have evolved. We believe our new name better reflects who we are, the people we support, and our vision for the future."

The rebranding process began in 2019 but quickly took a back seat when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in our world. The team pivoted to focus on the urgent mental and chemical health care needs fueled by the pandemic. By the fall of 2020, the agency started asking for feedback from clients, employees, community partners, and the public regarding the existing name and brand identity.

"We had confirmation from our stakeholders that our name was a barrier. In a sea of business names that begin with 'North,' we got lost in the mix," said Michelle Adolphsen, Alluma's chief marketing and communications officer. "And there was still a perception that we only help people who have very serious or chronic mental illnesses. We certainly do

that but we have specialists who treat and support people on the full spectrum of mental wellbeing and chemical health care needs. Our new name helps us reposition ourselves to reach people who wouldn't have considered reaching out to us in the past."

The name Alluma was created by intentionally combining the word 'all' and the Latin term for light, 'luma,' creating a new word that could be interpreted as 'everyone shines.' It communicates that the agency provides a beacon of light and hope for our community.

In addition to a new name and brand identity, the agency launched a new website, allumacares.org, and a new face in social media spaces, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. New signage at the Crookston and East Grand Forks facilities reflects the new name.

What hasn't changed is the commitment to providing high-quality mental wellbeing and substance use care for our region. Rooted in research and focused on relationships, Alluma offers a broad range of services to build individuals' capacity and wellbeing. Common conditions treated include depression, anxiety, addiction, and PTSD.

"We begin every client relationship with a comprehensive evaluation using evidence-based, trauma-informed practices to understand symptoms and goals,"

explained Reitmeier. "Then we explain treatment options and recommendations to achieve the best possible outcome for healing and overall wellbeing."

In addition to mental health services, Alluma also provides housing support, homeless services, chemical health care, case management, care coordination, and psychiatric services. And as they continue to expand their services, the message to the community is clear: All are welcome at Alluma. — **Michelle Adolphsen**

**Don't be a Dealer
Take Back Drugs No
Longer Being Used**

Saturday, Oct. 23

10 a.m.- 2 p.m

Polk Co. Sheriff's Office
in Fosston

Any time in the Collection
Box in the Police Station
in East Grand Forks

**DEA National r/x
TAKEBACK Day**

Development of budget a normal thing **Effects of pandemic, roofs, refinancing, positions, etc.**



Budget time, now if I can just remember what normal is.

I suspect many of you are having that sense of just what is returning to normal? Here we are, sending kids back to school and going to football games, all the familiar things that go with this time of year, but it still seems different. A pandemic seems to affect all sorts of things that are not just about staying healthy. I don't like the term "new normal" because the old normal wasn't around long enough to feel normal, now I can't remember anything normal. Just have to plow ahead, I guess.

And so, it is with the County budget development for 2022. We are still dealing with pandemic related programming demands in Public Health and Social Services, and if you are sick and tired of the pandemic, just imagine what our Public Health staff has been going through.

They've been active getting COVID vaccinations out since April, facing the prospects of booster shots later this year and now are ramping up for flu shots. Social Services continues to see program changes coming from the state and federal levels and local needs to respond to as folks are still trying to get back to their normal. Resources have been coming to the County to help with all this, but the reality appears to be that 2022 is still going to be a pandemic related year. However, that is starting to feel more normal, for what that is worth.

One effect of the pandemic that any employer is facing is the lack of workers and the competition to find and retain the ones we have. Polk County is no different. Turnover in some departments is high, others not so much. We are in the process as of this writing of negotiating eight

labor agreements with the expectation of three year contracts and trying to come up with ways to keep our great employees, attract new ones to fill vacancies all while trying to predict where we will be in three years. Since we didn't know we'd be here now three years ago, we're trying to tackle our health insurance costs and expect a lot of dialogue on pandemic related issues. We can see however a wave of retirements coming as baby boomers age out, and unfortunately take a lot of experience and knowledge with them. All the more reason to be competitive when it comes to hiring, but also to develop our existing employees for the leadership we will need.

Then there are the practical issues we have to budget for. Last spring and for the second roofing project in a year on two different buildings we had a downpour just after the roof had been removed and before its replacement was made at the Juvenile Detention facility in Crookston. The interior was basically ruined, and our resident juvenile inmates moved to other locations around the state. Not only do we have to remodeling and repair the facility, but we also pay (through Tri-County Community Corrections) for the placement of those individuals elsewhere. We will feel the impact of this in the budget, and it appears likely the facility won't fully be reopened for another year. The County and Tri-County are litigating the situation and we will see where that goes. In the meantime, I believe we can use existing funds for the remodeling, but those operational costs are going to add up.

Another direct impact of the pandemic is high projection of our utility costs. While we

have worked hard to achieve operational cost efficiencies in our building – the Government Center, Judicial Center, Highway Building, Transfer Stations in Crookston and Fosston, and our Human Services Building in East Grand Forks, fuel and electric costs are up enough to create a real push in our budgeting. Hopefully this will not be normal for long.

The most normal thing however is a good thing, the County remains fiscally strong and capable of absorbing a "rainy" day now and then, even if it means dealing with the results of a real rainstorm. The Board will likely be refinancing the final four years of the 2008 Jail Bonds saving over \$130,000 in interest. While there are no great capital improvement plans planned in 2022, the Board will look at a couple of new positions geared for longer term need – a Deputy County Administrator and perhaps a communications specialist to stream meetings live and even take over this newsletter among other things. The County also has just over \$6million in American Relief Program funds provided by the federal government to be used to mitigate COVID-19 related costs and improvements needed as a result of the pandemic. We will see how it shakes out.

The Board approved a preliminary levy increase of 4.6% over 2021 which amounts to \$1,150,000 in additional levy. Normally the Board targets around a final 3% levy increase so some hard work and tough choices face us as we work toward finalizing next year's budget.

I guess from that standpoint it's as normal as it's ever been.
— **Chuck Whiting, Polk County administrator**

County's property valuation increases

As determined by the Polk County assessor for the purpose of assessing property taxes that will be payable in 2022, the 2021 valuation of real estate in the county now totals \$5,880,628,200.

This new total amount of valuation represents an increase of \$139,976,700 over 2020, or about 2.4 percent.

Of the new 2021 total valuation amount:

- 54.4% is for tillable agricultural lands.
- 7.4% is for all other agricultural property.
- 27.1% is for residential properties.
- 4.8% is for seasonal recreational properties.
- 2.5% is for commercial properties.
- 2.0% is for industrial properties.
- 3.4% is for building sites (rural homes and garages on 1 acre *).
- 1.7% is for "all other" property classifications.

New construction accounted for \$26,601,300 of the total valuation.

The overall increase is mainly due to an increase in the valuations for residential, commercial, and industrial properties throughout the county due to strong markets for each property type.

Note — The figures above are based on the 2021 PRISM 2 report (Final).

The valuation total does not take into account railroad or utility values.

*— Included in "all other" agricultural property

Updated: Sept. 7, 2021

K9s add to effectiveness in drug enforcement

Anyone wondering about the effectiveness of the drug enforcement program in Polk County needs to know what Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force Commander A. Schrage, a sergeant in the East Grand Forks Police Department, has heard from dealers. That word is that many of them just don't want to try to do business in Polk County because of the high likelihood that they will be found out, will be arrested and that they will go to jail.

A big part of that enforcement involves the three K9 that work in Polk County and with the task force.

Two of the dogs are a part of the Polk County Sheriff's Department. Deputy Kyle Olson handles Buffy, a four-year-old Belgian Malinois-Shepherd, and Deputy Ben Stout handles Rex, a two-year-old German Shepherd-Belgian Malinois. Rex just came on the job this summer.

The third K9 is a part of the East Grand Forks Police Department, which had the first of the three dogs starting in early 2018. That dog, Leroy, a five-year-old German Shepherd from the Czech Republic, is handled by police officer Tyler Hajicek. Leroy has been deployed 85 times since January 2020.

In addition to the three dogs in Polk County are K9s that are maintained by the other members of the eight-county Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force including those in nearby Marshall, Pennington and Norman counties.

"You pretty much know if there are drugs in a house," the Polk County member of the task force (unnamed here because of involvement in undercover work that might be done as a part of investigations) says. "But if it is in a car you can't smell drugs if they are hidden, like in a tire or a gas tank. You can't smell meth but the dogs are trained to smell it. The dogs are especially integral in vehicle searches and when they hit on something that gives you the probable cause needed to further the



Deputy Ben Stout and Rex

search.

"And having a drug dog there often deters people from running when confronted. The dogs are just a great tool."

In a recent case, Leroy prevented a dealer who had been pursued beginning in Marshall County from getting away. When the vehicle was stopped in East Grand Forks the man was able to run into Grand Forks but he didn't get far. Leroy caught him there and prevented a confrontation

with police. The car contained an extensive amount of drugs.

Following the pursuit and stoppage of a car in Crookston, Sgt. Schrage had the dealer confined and was holding him at gunpoint. The very uncooperative dealer decided to challenge officer Schrage's hold on him saying, "You aren't going to shoot me." As the dealer moved into position of confrontation, Buffy came on the scene. "As soon as he saw the dog, the dealer quickly backed off. It wasn't worth it.

"That could have been an ugly situation," Sgt. Schrage says, "but when Buffy got there, it was game over. Dealers don't want to confront a K9. The dogs prevent a lot of incidents from happening."

In another case on Jan. 20, Leroy became so excited that he jumped through the car window to take down a major dealer in Ada in Norman County. That incident, which occurred near a school and also involved a bomb, could have become disastrous. That was a major dealer in Norman County.

Drug dogs working in the northwestern Minnesota Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force territory have had a major role in 15 arrests this year. Besides drug arrests, the dogs make regular visits to schools to meet with kids and to do school sweeps when requested. They also do sweeps of the Northwest Regional Corrections Center jail in Crookston. All three dogs participate in the jail searches because of the size of the facility.

"The dogs get along very well with the kids," Schrage says. "And they are a wonderful public relations tool. They open a lot of doors for us that way."

And about the fact that many dealers try to avoid Polk County, Sgt. Schrage says, "We regard that as a real badge of honor. The dealers have said, too, that the prosecutors in Polk County 'swing for the fences,' so when you get caught in Polk County, you're going to do time."



Report Welfare Fraud

People who give false information or withhold facts in order to receive Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) aid, food stamps, general assistance, childcare or medical assistance may be guilty of fraud.

You may remain anonymous

You may wish to report: Persons not reporting income; incorrect reporting of persons living in the home; misuse of food stamps or Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards; falsifying of information on application; unreported property and assets; or persons receiving dual benefits (from more than one state).

Information you should report:

- Who — The name of the person
- What — The fraud suspected
- When — Date of occurrence
- Where — Address of person

If you suspect someone of misusing or abusing Minnesota assistance programs, call the Polk County Sheriff's Office at this number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:
1-218-281-0431 (ask for extension 2249)

Warm, dry weather aided road construction

The 2021 construction season is coming to an end. With the dry warm weather construction went well for the most part.

Construction on County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 11 (Fisher Avenue) in Crookston couldn't have gone any better. The CSAH 1 bridges were closing in on completion until a slight mishap occurred. Now, they may take a couple more weeks to finish.

The rest of the construction is moving along as planned and should be completed by Oct. 1.

Here is the list of all the work that was completed this year:

- CSAH 1 – Reconstruct two bridges – E. limits of Fertile to CSAH 10.
- CSAH 6 – Hot in-place recycling and bituminous overlay from Fosston to CSAH 3.
- CSAH 6 – Hot in-place

recycling and bituminous overlay from TH 92 to No. county line.

- CSAH 11 (Fisher Ave) – Reconstruction to urban section from No. Broadway to E. limits of Crookston.
- CSAH 11 – Bituminous mill and overlay from E. limits of Crookston to CSAH 46.
- CSAH 27 - Hot in-place recycling and bituminous overlay from CSAH 6 to E. county line.

• CSAH 57 – Full depth reclamation and overlay from CSAH 13 to E. county line.

Other work completed this year included township box culvert projects in Brandsvold, Esther, Euclid, Grove Park and Russia townships, and base-one stabilized aggregate surfacing on CR 201 from TH 2 to Lengby and on CSAH 29 from CSAH 3 to E. county line. — **Richard Sanders, Polk County engineer**

Commissioner committee assignments

Jerry Jacobson (Dist. 1) — Polk County Board of Commissioners (chair); Polk County Social Services Board (chair), Polk County Board of Health, Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) Environment & Natural Resources Policy Committee, Sand Hill Watershed District Advisory Committee, Minnesota Rural Counties (delegate), Northwest MentalHealth Board (member at-large), Region 1 Area Agency on Aging Committee (v. pres.), Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Northwest Regional Development Commission, NWRDC Regional Transit Coordination Council (pres.), Regional Solid Waste Advisory Board (alternate), Lake Agassiz Regional Library Board (alternate), Polk County Parks Committee, Judicial Ditch 60 Committee, Polk-Red Lake Joint Ditches 1, 3 & 66 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Ditches 64 & 71 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditch 2 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Judicial Ditch 72 Committee, Crookston Downtown Task Force.

Warren Strandell (Dist. 2) — Polk County Board of Commissioners; Polk County Social Service Board (vice chair), Polk County Board of Health, Polk County Emergency Preparedness Committee, AMC Public Safety Policy Committee, Northwest Regional Corrections Board (chair), Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Board, Northwest Regional

Development Commission (vice chair), NWRDC Executive Board, NWRDC Transportation Advisory Committee (chair), MnDOT Dist. 2 Area Transportation Partnership (chair), Polk County Public Safety Committee, Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force, Polk County Building Committee, Polk County Hazardous Mitigation Committee, 911 Planning Committee, Red Lake Watershed Advisory Committee, Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization (secretary).

Gary Willhite (Dist. 3) — Polk County Board of Commissioners, Polk County Social Services Board, Polk County Board of Health, Lake Agassiz Regional Library Board (vice chair executive committee), Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Polk-Norman-Mahnomen County Joint Community Health Board, AMC General Government Policy Committee, Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Board (alternate), Polk County Parks Committee, Polk County Senior Health Care Providers, Polk County Public Safety Committee, Polk County Building Committee, Judicial Ditch 60 Committee, Polk County Extension Service Committee, Crookston Downtown Task Force.

Joan Lee (Dist. 4) — Polk County Board of Commissioners (vice chair), Polk County Social Services Board

(chair), Polk County Board of Health, AMC Health & Human Services Policy Committee, AMC Futures Committee, AMC Training & Education Committee, AMC Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators Subcommittee, State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC) delegate, SCHSAC Executive Committee member for northwest Minnesota, Regional Solid Waste Advisory Board, Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Joint Community Health Board, Polk County Finance Committee, Polk County Household Hazardous Waste Advisory Committee (chair), Polk County Extension Service Committee, Polk County Public Works Committee, Polk-Norman-Clay Agassiz Trail Advisory Committee (chair), Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force (alternate), Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditches 1, 3 & 66 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditches 64 & 71 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Judicial Ditch 72 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditch 72 Committee, Red Lake River Corridor Joint Board, Inter-County Community Council Board, East Polk County Development Achievement Center Board (treasurer), Fosston Law Enforcement Committee, Water Resource Advisory Committee; Wild Rice-Marsh River Watershed District (chair), Polk County Personnel

Committee, AMC District 3 alternate delegate, Environmental Protection Agency Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) and Small Communities Advisory Committee (SCAS), 21st Century Strengthening Public Health Committee.

Mark Holy (Dist. 5) — Polk County Board of Commissioners, Polk County Social Services Board, Polk County Board of Health, Northwest Regional Corrections Board, Polk County Tax-Forfeiting Property Viewing Committee, Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust Board of Directors representing Minn. Dist. 3, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, AMC Transportation Policy Committee, One Watershed One Plan, Joint Powers Board of the Red River Basin Commission in Minnesota, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditches 1, 3 & 66 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditches 64 & 71 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Ditch 2 Committee, Red Lake-Polk County Joint Judicial Ditch 72 Committee, Polk County Judicial Ditch 60 Committee, Red Lake River Corridor Joint Board, Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District Citizens Advisory Committee, Polk County Public Works Committee, Law Library Board of Directors, Red Lake River Corridor Joint Board, Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization (alternate).

County Board Meeting Times

- 8:00 a.m. on 1st Tuesday of the month
- 9:30 a.m. on the 3rd Tuesday
- 8:00 a.m. on the 4th Tuesday

All meetings are open to the public

County Commissioners

- Dist. 1 — Jerry Jacobson, chair
- Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell
- Dist. 3 — Gary Willhite
- Dist. 4 — Joan K. Lee, v. chair
- Dist. 5 — Mark Holy

**Make a Difference
Change a Life
Become a Foster Parent!**
Polk County Social Services
1-877-281-3127

Pandemic slowed but didn't stop drug activity

With home searches not being done during the height of the pandemic, the number of drug arrests made in the second quarter of 2021 was down compared to the number made in the second quarter in 2020, but that didn't mean that the drug activity was taking a break.

The Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force team made 67 arrests in the second quarter of 2021 compared to the 50 arrests made in the same period of 2020. Of the searches that were made in 2021, 27 were done with consent and 18 were done through the power of search warrants.

Seizures made in the 2021 period — with the number in parenthesis indicating the comparable number from the second quarter of 2020 — included 6 for weapons (22) along with the following amounts of drugs: 989.5 grams of methamphetamine (2,411); 7.8 grams of heroin (0); 74 grams of marijuana (2.9 lbs.); 171 grams of mushrooms (17.4 grams), and 149 prescription pills (45).

There were no arrests for butane hash oil (BHO) cartridges in the second quarter of 2021 after having 2,411 grams of BHO be involved in the 2020 arrests.

Murder case

Significant cases in the eight-county area served by the Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force team included one in Polk County that resulted in two men being charged with murder for providing fake M-30 pills to a 32-year-old woman, who subsequently overdosed and died. Other agencies involved with that case were the Minnesota State Patrol and the Polk County Sheriff's Office. The woman was found unresponsive outside a stalled vehicle near Fertile. In the vehicle were two young children. Physically unharmed, they were placed in protective custody.

M-30 pills, which contain fentanyl, "have been flooding the region and are extremely deadly as they are the cause of a number of overdoses," according to a Pine to Prairie official report.

In other cases a large drug dealer was arrested in western Polk County and is likely facing federal charges; a search warrant executed for a house in East Grand Forks resulted in the recovery of numerous stolen items including a pistol and methamphetamine; information provided about a possible drug dealer in Crookston resulted in a search that recovered two large totes of paraphernalia; and information about a possible dealer in East Grand Forks led to the discovery of one pound of meth that was hidden in an apartment.

Pine to Prairie officers also participated in a number of regional cases one of which resulted in the arrest in Grand



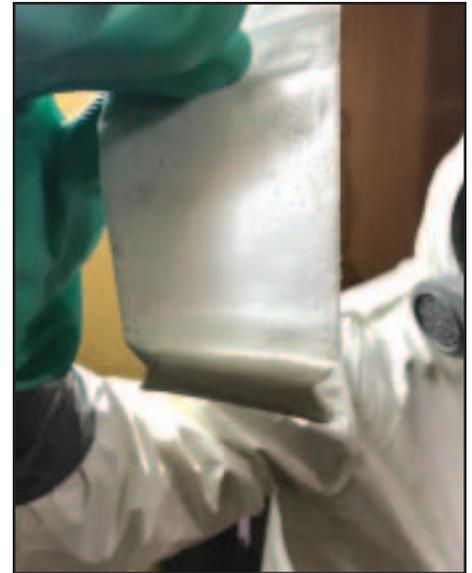
M30 pills contained methanyl

Forks of two suspected drug dealers (men from Thief River Falls and from Grand Forks), and the conviction of a Thief River Falls woman involved in the overdose and death of a friend.

The Task Force, which focuses on mid to upper-level dealers, is made up of sheriff's department deputies, city police department officers and up to five U.S. Border Patrol and Homeland Security officers.

Polk County and the cities of Crookston and East Grand Forks each provide one officer to the team while the City of Thief River Falls and Pennington County cooperate to provide an investigator. Counties contributing investigators to the force are Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Norman and Roseau. While not committing a full-time member to the task force, Kittson and Red Lake counties assist as needed. The task force made 235 arrests in the region in 2020.

Polk County, with two drug dogs, and Marshall and Norman counties and the



Powdered fentanyl was airborne in hotel room

cities of Thief River Falls and East Grand Forks have canine officers that are made available to the task force.

The task force receives \$200,000 in state funding annually. The money is split between the cities and counties to reimburse them for a portion of the salaries of the investigators that they provide to the team. A portion of the grant is also used for training and to purchase necessary equipment.

The task force is guided by a 14-member advisory board. That board is made up of East Grand Forks Police Chief Mike Hedlund (president), Crookston Police Chief Paul Biermaier (vice president), Polk County Sheriff Jim Tadman, Pennington County Sheriff Ray Kuznia, Thief River Falls Police Chief Dick Wittenberg, Crookston City Council member Clayton Briggs, East Grand Forks City Council member Mark Olstad, Polk County Commissioner Warren Strandell, Roseau County Sheriff Steve Gust, Assistant Roseau County Attorney Mike Grover, Norman County Sheriff Jeremy Thornton, Norman County Chief Deputy Ben Fall, Lake of the Woods County Sheriff Gary Fish, Lake of the Woods County Attorney James Austad, and Marshall County Sheriff Jason Boman.

Associate (non-voting) advisory board members include Polk County Attorney Greg Widseth, Red Lake County Sheriff Mitch Bernstein, Ada Police Chief Jody Bueng, Kittson County Sheriff Mark Wilwant, U.S. Border Patrol Agent Scott Webster, and Homeland Security Investigations Agent Josh Goldberg.

'The times' making Solid Waste update difficult

Waste and recycling volumes are increasing

It is difficult to provide an update on many things in CY2021 given the radical events of the past 1-2 years and the uncertain times we seem to be entering at present. While many things seem to be familiar and relatively normal, others seem surreal or completely foreign at the same time.

Waste & recycling

As the region moved away from the severe pandemic protocols and regulations that were in place early in CY2021, and sectors of the economy again began to re-open, waste and recycling volumes increased.

Increased waste volumes were received at both the Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in Fosston and at the Mixed Solid Waste Landfill near Gentilly (MSW LF). In addition, the volume of recyclable materials processed likewise increased. It is unknown if this increase in waste and recycling is due to a shift in commerce from in-person to online, a byproduct of more work from home employment, a faster transition of seasonal properties being converted to primary residences, or temporary uptick due to pandemic-related activities. It likely will be a year or more post-pandemic before we are able to know for certain.

What is certain is that shortages of materials and supplies is an ongoing issue and has been getting worse over time. Replacement parts for equipment have long lead times, are becoming scarce, and cost is increasing. Arranging for truck hauling is becoming difficult, and the price for it is increasing. Required supplies for ongoing operations are delayed, and often received at the last minute.

Over the last 12 months the sale prices of recycled materials that are marketed has soared with increases over the last year ranging between 150 to 1,000% or more. While it is nice to see the recyclable material sales figures increasing, the products those materials are ultimately made into then increases, too.



A new compost receiving site is under construction

It is uncertain if this pattern will continue or not, but at present there are no indications that it won't.

Facility staffing

Going back to even before the onset of the pandemic, staffing levels have been a concern at all solid waste facilities. Having enough people available to operate safely and efficiently and keep all programs available has not always been possible.

There were times in the summer of 2021 that staff levels dropped to the point it looked as though major programs and parts of facilities may be closed. It was only because the existing staff at these sites were willing to take up the extra work and incur the longer hours that program and facility closures did not occur.

Going back to the fall/winter of 2019 it had been a challenge to attract qualified applicants to apply for the job postings. Once the pandemic occurred, many of the postings for open positions failed to attract any qualified applicants. As businesses began to reopen, and increased demand for an already short labor supply occurred, labor shortages were magnified at these sites.

Program changes

Despite keeping the 'lights on' for these programs, a com-

bination of increased demand for service, decreased staff levels and increased inquiry/usage by non-eligible parties led to the decrease or suspension of some programs and services.

A cut-back in hours of operation for the public drop-off yard in Fosston and decreased after-hours access to the recycling drop-off area in Crookston were but a few of the impacts realized. However, as staffing levels begin to return to normal, other communities resume their programs (so they do not abuse ours) and the pandemic protocols allow for a more normal service delivery, it is intended these programs will continue to transition back to normal.

Facility improvements

The transfer station in Crookston is in the process of replacing the temporary yard waste receiving area. The people who have used the temporary pad are all too familiar with the challenges following rain events (wash-outs, deep water-filled depressions and getting stuck in the mud). Likewise, the receiving area was small, traffic congested, and often wait times were long due to large loads or mixed loads. The new site will be constructed with a permanent, all-weather concrete pad which will be both larger in size and

more convenient for drop-off. This should greatly reduce the headache associated with site conditions.

In an attempt to address issues with congestion and wait-times, changes in how yard waste will be accepted at the transfer station site will occur starting in the spring of 2022. Leaves, grass and small brush will be collected separate from larger brush, tree limbs and logs. Small materials (leaves/grass) do not need to be further processed to reduce the material size before being composted.

Larger wood materials (limbs/logs) require shredding to reduce the size of the material to that which can be composted. Because processing that material with a shredder is expensive, a charge will be placed on those larger items. The program was originally set up for residential use – i.e. small volumes.

As the program has evolved, both the frequency of delivery and the volume of leaves and grass being received from commercial sources (commercial lawn care services) at the transfer station has greatly increased. While we are willing to accept commercial source yard waste, these commercial yard waste

See SOLID WASTE, Page 10

County regulates the enforcement of Buffer Law

Polk County Planning & Zoning is the enforcement entity responsible for regulating Minnesota Buffer Law §103F.48.

The Polk County zoning ordinance was amended in 2017 to incorporate the rules, regulations, and enforcement procedures of the buffer law consistent with the state statutes §103F.48. There are two agencies responsible for the buffer program in Polk County, the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and the Polk County Planning & Zoning Department.

Landowners should work with their local SWCD and take the appropriate steps to follow all buffer requirements on each specific parcel. Also, landowners should contact their local SWCD office (West Polk SWCD at 218-281-6070 or East Polk SWCD at 218-563-2777) to notify the district if steps were taken to implement the buffer areas. The SWCD determines compliance with the buffer regulations and Polk County assists in the violation enforcement highlighted below.

The ordinance requires that landowners owning property adjacent to a water resource identified and reviewed on the Minnesota

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) buffer protection map (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html>) must establish and maintain a buffer to protect the state's water resources as follows:

a) DNR Public Watercourse (rivers & creeks): a 50-foot average width and 30-foot minimum width continuous buffer of perennially rooted vegetation.

b) Public Drainage Systems (ditches): a 16.5-foot minimum width continuous vegetative buffer.

If you receive a Corrective Action Notice (CAN) it requires the landowner to take action to correct the noncompliant buffer or an APO with monetary penalties to follow.

Landowners that receive a CAN must contact the local SWCD to determine the steps to get the buffer into compliance with the law.

Fall seeding can be a great time to get grasses established for the spring, so don't forget to seed the required buffer areas on all the parcels adjacent to public waters and public ditch systems prior to the ground freezing. If landowners fail to establish and maintain a required buffer, they may be subject to Administrative

Penalty Orders (APO) and/or criminal enforcement by Polk County. The APO monetary penalties for initial violations are as follows.

i. \$0 for 11 months after issuance of the Corrective Action Notice;

ii. \$50 per parcel per month for the first six (6) months (180 days) following the time period in i; and

iii. \$200 per parcel per month after six (6) months (180 days) following time period in ii.

For more information on buffers, visit the Polk County website at www.co.polk.mn.us under the Environmental Services and Planning & Zoning Department page. There is a buffer mapping tool available on the website to assist landowners in determining the watercourse or public ditches in relation to their specific parcels.

The goal of the buffer program in Polk County is to get buffers put in place and not have to enforce parcels through the APO enforcement procedures. For more information contact Polk County Planning & Zoning at (218) 281-5700. — **Jacob Snyder, assistant administrator Polk County Environmental Services**

Solid waste

Continued from Page 9

sources are encouraged to take their large loads directly to the compost site. If those large volumes are received at the transfer station, charges for hauling that material to the compost site will be assessed.

The exact rates and limitations for this program will be determined by the county at the end of 2021. Large volume yard waste generators are encouraged to check-in at the transfer station this winter for updates on limitations and rates.

The Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in Fosston is also looking at some changes to how it operates to deal with the changing character of the material stream, increased waste and recycling volumes and labor challenges. One of the changes being strongly considered at the RRF is the incorporation of robotic sorters at various quality control stations.

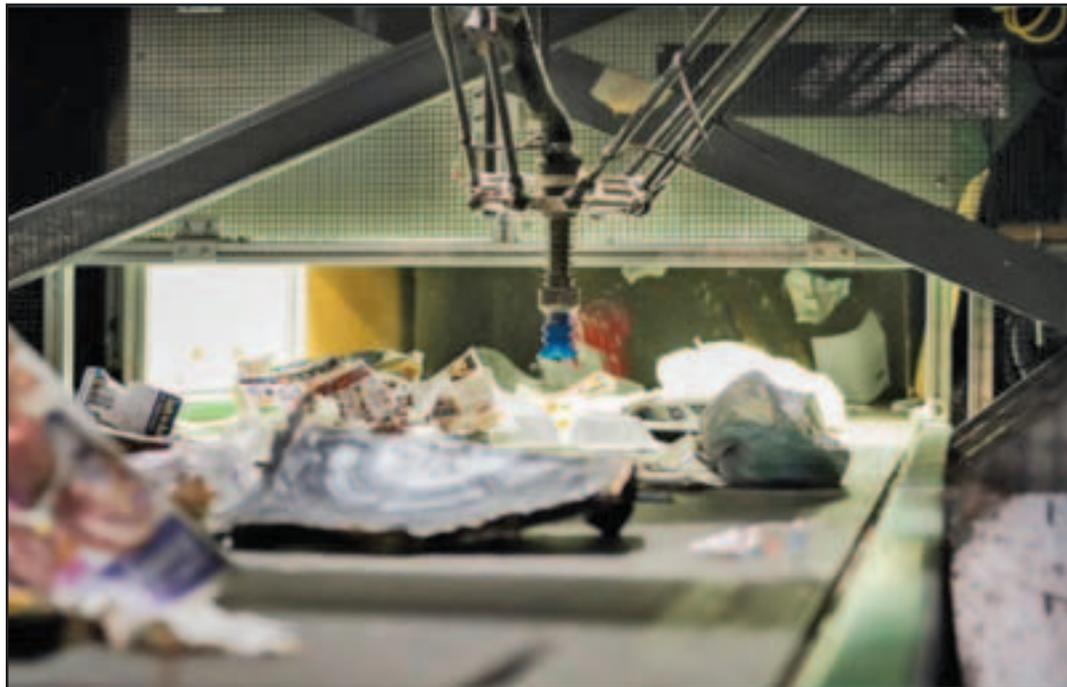
Robots can be used to clean up the recyclable materials that were removed from the waste and recyclables that are processed at the RRF. Often

times when recyclables are removed from the materials being processed, they collide or carry with them other types of materials that were in close proximity to the target material.

Often this contamination is a piece of paper, plastic film or a

different type of container than what was targeted to be removed. Rather than have human sorters removing this contamination before the recyclable material is baled and sold, robotic sorters would do some of that work. This would

eliminate the need for sorters and allow the sorters we have on staff to concentrate on aspects of the job robots cannot and should not be doing. — **Jon Steiner, executive director, Polk County Environmental Services**



Robotics considered for job of picking recyclable items out of the waste stream

County Public Health recognized for service

Earlier in 2021, RiverView Health announced Polk County Public Health (PCPH) as its 2020 Reaching Out to Serve award recipient.

For 30 years, RiverView has recognized individuals, groups, and programs with the Reaching Out to Serve award. The award symbolizes RiverView's mission of serving the region while demonstrating innovative voluntary self-initiated efforts and improving the access, quality, or cost-effectiveness of healthcare.

"Polk County Public Health has been a wonderful leader and partner, not only for RiverView Health but for the businesses and communities it serves during this COVID-19 pandemic," stated April Grunhvd, RiverView's vice president of patient care/CNO. "Our team at RiverView Health is blessed by our partnership and collaboration with Polk County Public Health and grateful for their leadership and the support provided to our team, our communities, and our patients."

"We have a long-standing public-private working relationship with RiverView Health, and the COVID-19 response has only strengthened our col-



RiverView Health – Reaching Out To Serve award Left to right: April Grunhvd, RiverView Health; Codi Lehmann, Angel Korynta, Sarah Reese, PCPH; Andy Oman, RiverView Health Board of Director, and Carrie Michalski, RiverView Health; Kathy Girdler and Kirsten Fagerlund, PCPH.

laboration. I am grateful for our (RiverView and PCPH) collective efforts — leadership during the bright spots and when times were tough, thoughtful and innovative solutions for each new challenge that popped up and a tremendously strong commitment to serving others," shared Sarah Reese, director of PCPH.

In August, the Night to Unite Committee in partnership with the Crookston Police Department recognized Polk County Public Health as a Hometown

Medical Hero for its role in the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We are honored and thank RiverView Health and Night to Unite/Crookston Police Department for recognizing Polk County Public Health in 2021. I am forever grateful for our Polk County Board and administrative support, our team of highly skilled Public Health professionals who care deeply about our county, and our healthcare, school, media and other community partners who come together to provide feedback,

ask tough questions, seek to understand, and engage in being part of the solution. Thank you for helping and supporting our communities in these uncertain times." said Reese.

Covid-19 cases in Polk County are on the rise. You can help to slow the spread.

- Mask up
- Keep physical distance
- Wash your hands
- Stay home if sick
- If eligible, get vaccinated

FDA amends emergency use authorization

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) amended the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on Sept. 22, to allow for use of a single booster dose in certain populations.

CDC recommends: The following groups should get a booster dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at least six months after the second dose:

- People 65 years and older.
- Residents in long-term care settings.
- People ages 50 to 64 with certain underlying medical conditions (refer to CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions).

The following groups may get a booster dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at least six months after the second dose, if the personal benefits for them outweigh

the personal risks:

- People ages 18 to 49 who are at high risk for severe COVID-19 due to certain underlying medical conditions (refer to CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions).
- People ages 18 to 64 who are at increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and transmission because of where they live or work.

These recommendations are only for those who received Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as their primary series.

No authorizations or recommendations on a booster dose were made for those who received Moderna or Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine for their primary series at this time.

More data on the effectiveness and safety of Moderna and Janssen booster shots are expect-

ed in the coming weeks. We will provide more information when we have it.

For public health purposes, people are still considered fully vaccinated two weeks after completion of their primary vaccine series (i.e., two-dose mRNA vaccine series or a single dose of the Janssen vaccine).

This definition applies to all people, including those who are eligible to receive an additional dose as recommended for moderate to severely immunocompromised people, and those who are eligible to receive a booster dose.

People who have been fully vaccinated with any of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines continue to have good protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even against the Delta variant.

Along with the current recommendations, CDC and ACIP emphasized that the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19 are those who are unvaccinated. The nation's priority should remain getting everyone fully vaccinated with their primary series.

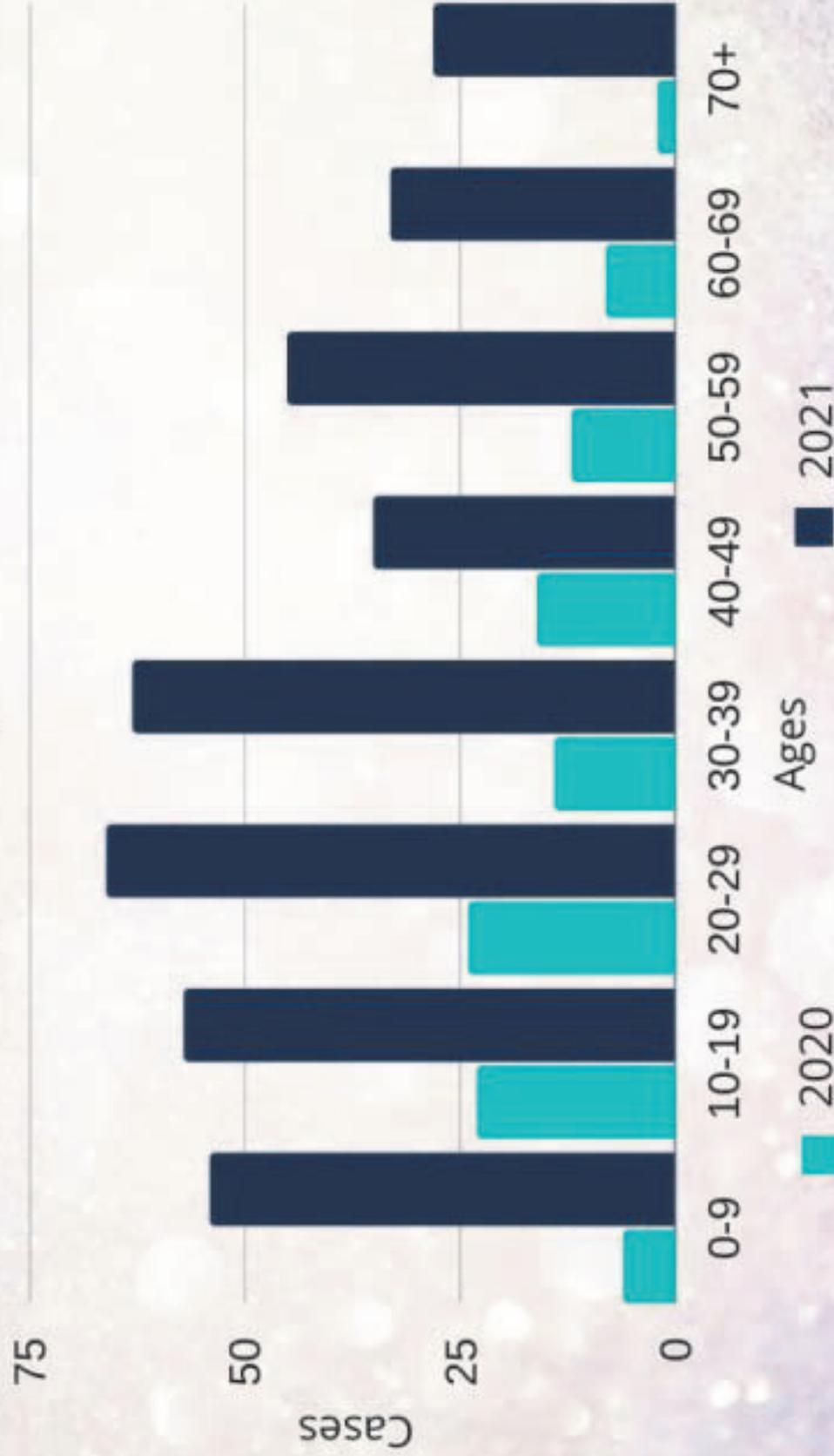
• The COVID-19 vaccines approved and authorized in the United States continue to be effective in reducing risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even against the widely circulating Delta variant.

• Nearly all the cases of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 continue to occur among those not yet vaccinated.

• Data presented showed hospitalization rates are 10 to 22 times higher among the unvaccinated compared to vaccinated adults.

COVID-19 Cases By Age Group 2020 Compared to 2021

August 21st- September 21st

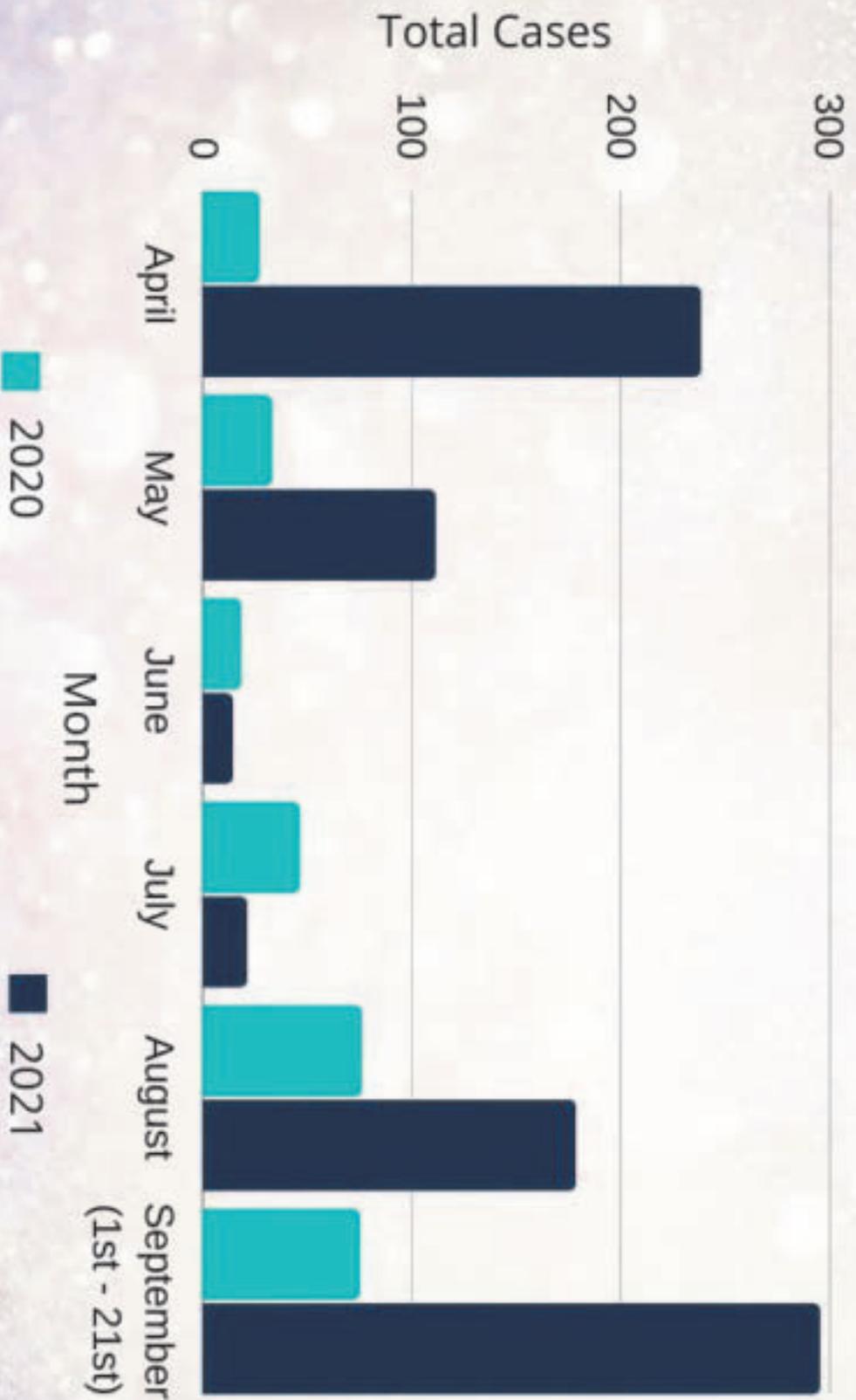


TOGETHER WE CAN build a better future.



COVID-19 Cases Per Month

2020 Compared to 2021



TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future.*



Total COVID-19 Cases 2020 Compared to 2021

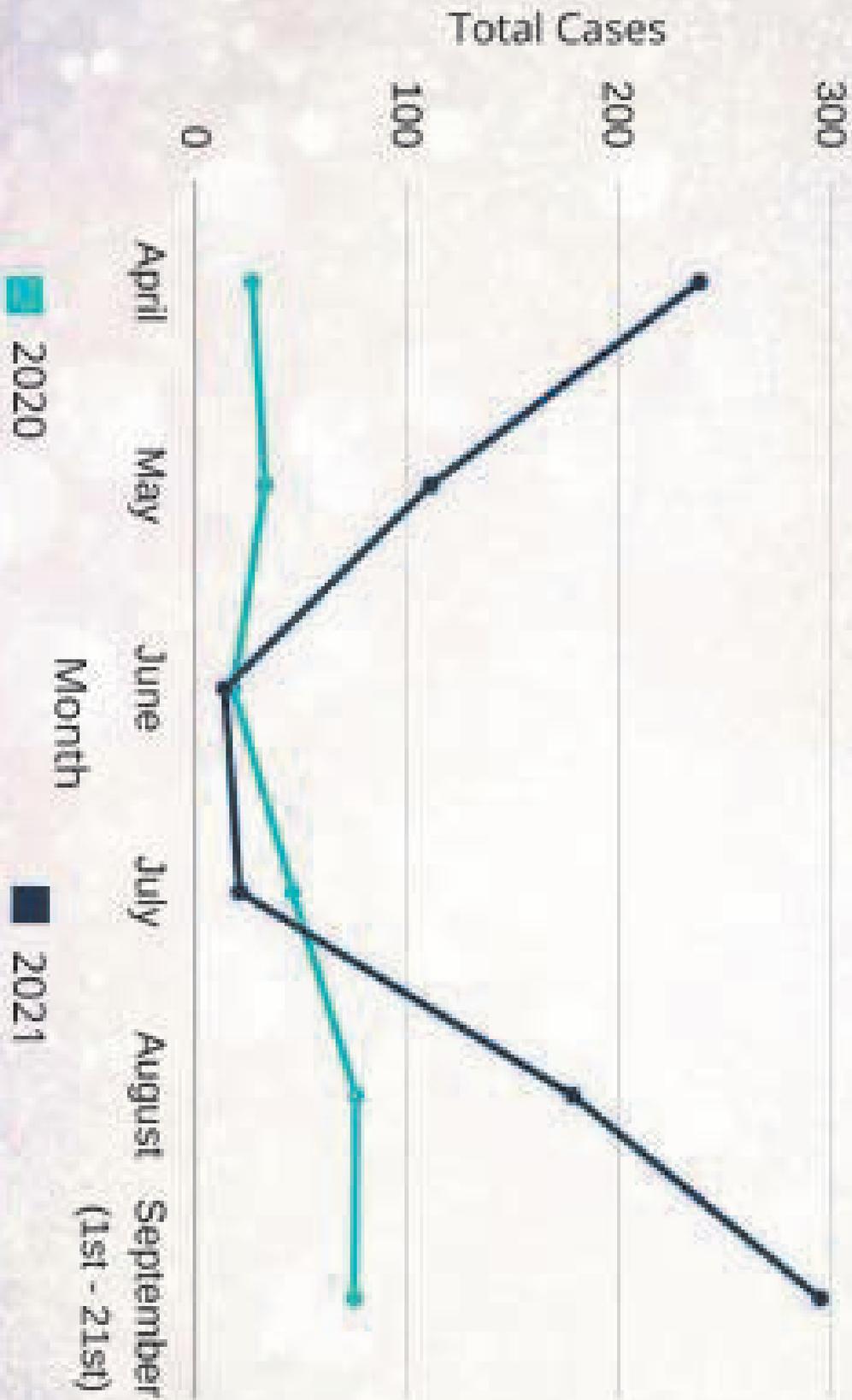
August 21st - September 21st



TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future.*

COVID-19 Cases Per Month

2020 Compared to 2021



TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future.*



Boat cleaning station to help protect waterways

The Polk County Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Task Force has made a recent purchase to help protect waterways in the county. Polk County Commissioners authorized the Task Force to use grant funding saved in prior years to purchase a CD3 Wayside solar boat cleaning station from a Minnesota-based company.

CD3 systems products aim to give the public tools and equipment to combat AIS spread throughout the country.

The Minnesota clean, drain, dry initiative aims to keep boats and watercrafts free of water which ultimately keeps aquatic invasive species where they are. Responsible lake and river users need to take necessary steps to take the time to look over all watercraft equipment when recreating on lakes and rivers. Aquatic hitchhikers continue to spread all throughout Minnesota on boats and watercrafts.

The cleaning stations will help lake and river users have the necessary tools to combat aquatic invasive species from



Solar-powered boat cleaning unit will help combat spread of AIS

hitching rides on watercrafts.

The AIS Task Force knows how important our lakes and rivers are for people recreating in Polk County. They aim to keep our waterways clean and productive for future genera-

tions of lakes and river users.

We are proud to have a CD3 system in our toolbox to combat AIS spread in Polk County. When you see the CD3 boat cleaning station at a nearby access site access it to clean

your watercraft, its free to use! For more information contact Polk County Environmental Services at (218) 281-5700. — **Jacob Snyder, assistant administrator Polk County Environmental Services**

Corrections job both interesting and challenging

When speaking with prospective employees about what makes working in the field of corrections interesting, I often describe how the job is always changing and there are lots of challenges that keep it interesting.

Looking back at the last year and a half, I'm not certain that I could have predicted what challenging would really mean. Global pandemic...check. Crisis level staffing shortages...check. Extensive water damage to the Juvenile Center during a year of extreme drought...check.

I do like a challenge, but this is getting a little ridiculous.

COVID Impact

While many of the COVID restrictions were lessened moving into the summer months, few changes have been made to COVID plans within the Northwest Regional Corrections Center (NWRCC). Because the jail is a high risk setting for transmission of pathogens, masking of staff, quarantining of new admissions, and regular testing and screening of staff and inmates has remained in place. While this has certainly been a pain for those who work within the facility, it has helped to limit the spread of COVID within the facility.

Through August 2021, the NWRCC has

only had 5 positive COVID cases and none of the cases required hospitalization. Testing protocols, which were implemented in 2020, have remained in place with slight modifications being made to the time frames for testing to allow for a slight reduction in the length of time new admissions have to be quarantined.

Through mid-September 2021, Health Services staff, with assistance from the Tri-County Community Corrections program department, have conducted 1,407 tests. In addition to the safeguards already in place, Tri-County has also encouraged the inmate population to obtain the vaccine while in custody which has resulted in excess of 180 inmates receiving at least one dose of vaccine while in custody.

Staffing Challenges

Staffing challenges that have been reported on in previous newsletters continue to plague Tri-County Community Corrections with the largest shortage being experienced within the NWRCC.

Staffing stability which TCCC had largely enjoyed began to change approximately 5 years ago and has progressively increased in volume. Staffing turnover is complicated further by difficulties in recruiting staff to

perform what can be a very challenging profession.

The staffing challenges are highlighted by the fact that in a review of the current corrections officer roster, more than half of all corrections officers employed at the NWRCC have less than 12 months experience. This results in greater difficulty managing operations as supervisors are relied upon to answer questions with greater frequency and employees receiving training in some posts by staff still learning the intricacies of the position.

In response to the staffing shortages, Tri-County has contracted with David Down Associates Human Resources Inc., to conduct a staffing study along with a position description and wage analysis. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the workplace culture, ensure that positions are properly classified and to determine if wages are competitive when compared against other agencies. It is the hope that the information obtained from this study, in combination with an internal review of existing recruitment and retention strategies, will help in stemming the tide of staff turnover.— **Andrew Larson, executive director Tri-County Community Corrections**