

# POLK COUNTY NEWSLETTER

FALL 2022

## 2023 budgeting difficult task again

After the past three years, I have given up on projections. This is a difficult thing to do when making a county budget, something that I have been doing in one shape or form now for over 35 years now.

At this time last year hardly anyone had begun talking about inflation, let alone experiencing it. Prior to that we were rebounding from the pandemic, and the year before we were bounding into experience it.

So, 2023, what to make of it? Here's what we know now, at least when it comes to setting up the budget.

First, there is no doubt inflation has affected County operations, and none more apparent than in energy costs. County buildings, the incinerator and even vehicle gas are showing up with significant increases

by **Chuck Whiting**

**County Administrator**



es in the initial department budgets.

Second, employment and wages are issues. Last year we were closing up most of our labor contracts, being fairly aggressive with cost-of-living increases and health insurance changes.

I have noted that just over 1% of Polk County's population is employed by Polk County, approximately 340 positions. We

have good employees; I can honestly say from experience I believe we serve our residents well.

But, as most of you know this is a very competitive labor market right now and our good employees have options, not the least of which is retirement for our more senior workers. As of this writing, the County has had just over 60 positions to fill since Jan. 1.

You have likely seen ads, sometimes the same ad over and over again as we search for people to fill these positions. It has not been unusual to receive zero applications for a vacant position, and for those 60 vacancies we've received about 200 applications. At one point this summer, 17

**See BUDGET on Page 2**

## Robots could become control sorters at the MRF

The Polk County Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in Fosston applied for state bond funding for a Phase III project to improve the efficiency of the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and make some modification to the Compost Facility at the Polk County Landfill Complex near Gentilly.

The Phase III request was for \$2.4 million in state bond funds for a \$4.8 million total project cost.

The primary objective of the request was to acquire robots to incorporate into the MRF to fill the void for quality control sorters — positions unable to be filled for several years which require the MRF to shut down processing equipment already in service.

However, a bonding bill did not materialize in the 2022 legislative session.

Various alternatives are being

explored to compensate for the lack of the Phase III project funds. One promising option is a lease of robotic sorters, with the option to purchase in the event of a 2023 bonding bill if one materializes that includes our Phase III project. To that end, Polk County has held discussions and site visits with various robotic vendors to determine which would best meet the needs at the MRF.

The most promising option may be an offering from Everest Labs of California. Everest Labs offers a robotic option that appears to be about the same financial investment as other vendors, but does not appear to require the extensive retrofit of existing infrastructure as the other vendors offerings.

**See ROBOTS on Page 5**

## Commissioner races on the ballot

Two commissioner races are the only Polk County issues to be decided in the General Election on Tuesday, Nov. 8.

In District 2, Commissioner Warren Strandell is challenged by Curtis Knutson, Fisher, and in District 4, Commissioner Joan Lee is challenged by Dennis Boucher, McIntosh. Information about those candidates is provided on Pages 4 & 5.

Sheriff James Tadman and

County Attorney Greg Widseth are unopposed for re-election as are the members Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

The only candidates to file for re-election in East Polk County SWCD were Kenneth Pederson (Dist. 1), David Kiecker (Dist. 2), and Kory Sonsteli in Special East District. Candidates in West Polk County SWCD are Eric McWalter (Dist. 1), and Johnathan Sorenson (Dist. 3).



Robot sorter would look like this

PRESORTED STD  
US Postage  
PAID  
GRAND FORKS, ND  
PERMIT NO. 11

EGRWSS  
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## Tip fees for 2024 could be a victim of more inflation

Inflation is having its impacts on everyone and everything. The prices we pay for fuel, power, services and products are all up, and scarcity of parts, equipment and labor is driving those prices even higher.

The Landfill and Resource Recovery Facility are not immune to those external forces and, in fact, are impacted more so by them.

While 40 year highs in inflation are widely reported on the evening news, and currently touting year-over-year inflation at 8.4%, for certain things such as fuel that inflationary number is closer to 50% or more.

In addition to fuel, parts for specialty heavy equipment have become difficult to find, which has led to record repairs expenses at the Landfill being incurred.

At the Resource Recovery Facility, expenses for sodium bicarbonate — a material added to the flue gas to clean the emissions — has gone from approximately \$120,000 in 2021 to now being projected to exceed \$250,000 in 2023.

It's these types of expenses that severely impact the operational budgets for the Landfill and Resource Recovery Facility.

On the positive side, commodity prices for recycled materials reached record highs in the last part of 2021 and most of 2022. Between material

sales from the source separated recyclables and those recyclables extracted from the waste stream, the revenues have been at record highs — breaking \$1 million in sales in 2021 and nearly so thus far again in 2022.

These high sales revenues have eased the burden from the increased inflationary expenses. However, in the last few weeks there has been a major drop in commodity prices within the recycling market, which is alarming.

The 2023 budget for the Landfill and Incinerator banked upon the continued high recyclable material commodity prices in conjunction with a \$5/ton increase to the tipping fee at the Landfill and Resource Recovery Facility.

As stated at the time the tip fee for 2023 was set, it should be looked at as a bridge to a likely larger tip fee increase in 2024.

What the tip fee in 2024 will look like will depend upon if things stay the same or continue to worsen. If the recyclable commodities market is drastically depressed — as the latest numbers may indicate — then the \$5/ton tip fee increase in 2023 will not be sufficient. This situation will need to be monitored closely this fall and winter. — **Jon Steiner, Polk County Environmental Services director**

## Budget

Continued from Page 1

counties were looking for assistant county attorneys, including Polk County.

To address these labor issues the County is having a labor market study done and will soon determine how best to address the wage component of county employment. It is vital to keep up with contemporary wages and benefits to maintain the level of work and services that are required. It is not exactly new news to say more seems to be required every day.

### American Rescue Funds

Third, the County has received \$6.1 million of American Rescue Plan funds as the federal government's response to the pandemic. While the County Board has allocated a good portion of these funds for various non-profit organizations and cities in the county, about half of it has been retained to make up for lost county revenues, and public health and social services programming to facilitate pandemic recovery around the county and other projects. Use of these funds has not ended and will show up in the 2023 budget.

Fourth, the County Board has committed to maintaining county buildings. Next in line is the Justice Center, now 15 years old. The building needs a partial roof replacement and attention to its heating distribution system. More efficient boilers will also help bring down energy usage and costs.

Fifth, not everything is an item to groan about. 2023 will be the first tax year to recoup on the new valuation added from the Enbridge Energy pipeline replacement. Enbridge is Polk County's highest taxpayer.

### New Enbridge valuation

With their new Line 3, now called Line 93, staff estimates their property taxes will almost double to around \$1.2 million. This is not new revenue for the County, but more indicative of a shift in Enbridge's share of the overall property tax. While the County is appreciative of this, the rest of our property taxpayers may feel the benefits of this.

Finally, with much of the budget to go as of this date (Sept. 27) the Board of Commissioners set the preliminary levy increase of 5.5% for 2023.

Many of the issues I have listed above are still being worked on for the final budget, and the objective is still to bring the final levy increase in around 3 to 3.5% in December. Property owners will receive notice of their prospective property taxes based on the 5.5% increase.

You will also see the public hearing on the 2023 budget has been set for Tuesday, Dec. 13 at 6 p.m. in the Board Room in the Government Center in Crookston, everyone is invited to attend.

## Juvenile Center re-opening now at end of year

The odyssey which began on May 14, 2021 — when the Red River Valley Juvenile Center (RRVJC) received significant rainwater damage necessitating its temporary closure — should come to an end late this year.

Reconstruction of the RRVJC began in early April with some demolition of electrical and mechanical systems along with some much-needed repairs to underground plumbing. By the middle of May, much of the framing and the rough-in of HVAC, electrical

and plumbing was completed. By the end of June much of the sheetrock was hung.

Much of the work within the interior of the RRVJC is wrapping up with installation of flooring, fixtures and countertops really giving the space a finished look.

While much of the project has been completed on the original timeline, delivery the HVAC system has been delayed yet another three weeks. This is likely going to push the re-opening of the RRVJC to the middle or end of December and that is, of

course, assuming that there aren't any additional delays in the delivery of that equipment, which is a distinct possibility.

While there is a hoped for finish line for the reconstruction, there's a lot of other work that also needs to be completed before the RRVJC is ready to accept adolescents for placement. Due to the long-term closure, many of the staff who were employed at the RRVJC have left the agency and are not planning to return.

A concerted effort is now underway to recruit, select and train 6-8 new staff prior to the re-opening. In an already tight labor market, the prospect of

hiring and training this many new staff does create some sleepless nights for Tri-County Community Corrections administration.

When the dust settles (literally) and the RRVJC re-opens, placement agencies, future residents and the community can expect a new and improved building with new finishes, a better layout and system upgrades that will serve our communities for many years to come. — **Andrew Larson, Tri-County Community Corrections Center executive director**



CD3 Wayside solar boat cleaner

## Boat cleaning station in place at East Shore of Maple Lake

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

The line of CD3 systems products aim to give the public tools and equipment to combat AIS spread throughout the country by the clean, drain, dry philosophy.

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 to have the necessary tools to combat aquatic invasive species from hitching rides on watercrafts.

The AIS taskforce 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 generations of lakes

and river users. We are proud to have a CD3 system in our toolbox to combat AIS spread in Polk County.

In the 2022 boating season the CD3 makes its home at East Shore public launch area located at the northeast side of Maple Lake off County Highway 10.

This access provides sufficient space to use the unit without hindering people from using public access sites throughout Polk County. Even if you are not launching in Maple Lake stop in to test out the new cleaning station, its free to use! For more information visit [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) or join us on facebook under Polk County Environmental Services group. — **Jacob Snyder, assistant Environmental Services administrator**



Richard Langlois

# Replacement of Climax Bridge possible next year

Polk County has two bridges over the Red River of the North that are in need of replacement. Bridge 5767 (Nielsville Bridge) has been closed since 2015. Bridge 7097 (Climax Bridge) is currently restricted to 78,000 lbs.

The Climax Bridge (7097) is scheduled to be replaced in 2023-2024 and is partially funded with federal funding on both the Minnesota and North Dakota sides of the river. The remainder of the funding for Polk County's portion of the project will hopefully come from bonding funds approved by the Minnesota State Legislature or by either County State Aid Highway Construction Funds or Polk County's Local Option Sales Tax dollars.

The Climax Bridge (7097) will remain open during construction. The new bridge is to be constructed on a new alignment. In Traill County, the roadway will be raised and a culvert installed to help prevent the road from being overtopped during normal flooding.

The Nielsville Bridge (5767) will remain closed until funding can be secured to replace it. In the past, Polk and Traill counties have submitted yearly applications to the U.S. Department of Transportation for a Rebuilding American

Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant.

The project received high marks but was never selected for funding. With the new Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) transportation bill that Congress has approved, another type of grant was created called the Bridge Improvement Program (BIP). This is strictly for bridges that need to be replaced. Polk County, as the lead agency, submitted a grant application to replace not only the Nielsville Bridge, but also the bridges at Hendrum between Norman County and Traill County in North Dakota and at Georgetown between Clay County and Cass County in North Dakota.

These three fracture critical bridges over the Red River of the North are in need of replacement.

Because this grant application takes into account bridge bundling, which US DOT favors and has funded in the past, Polk County is hopeful that our application will be selected for funding. Polk County is asking for \$23.4 million in federal funding (80%) with the remaining 20% coming from the five counties. — **Richard Sanders, Polk County engineer**

## Langlois is named director of facilities

Richard Langlois became Polk County director of facilities in September as the successor to Mark Dietz, who had retired earlier this summer. A native of Crookston, Langlois had been assistant director of the Facilities Department.

After graduating from Crookston Central High School in 1977, Langlois worked 3 years at Red River Alfalfa Co., eight years at the Dahlgren & Co., and 28 years at Villa St. Vincent where he became maintenance director in 1997. He joined Polk County in 2016 as

assistant director of the Facilities Department.

Langlois and his wife Doreen (Chappuis), who were married in 1979, live near Crookston where Richard also farms with crops and cattle. They have three daughters, who live in the Crookston area: Jennifer (Derek) Bruggeman, Becky (Steve) Kofoed, Mandy (Darin) Gudvangen. Langlois is a member of Saint Peters Catholic Church and the Crookston Eagles and Knights of Columbus organizations.

# Commissioner candidates - District 2

## Curtis Knutson

Curtis Knutson was born and raised on the farmstead south of Fisher where he lives today.

He and his wife Kim have four children: Amy (Russell) Shimek, Chad (Carmen) Knutson, Kristen (Travis) Schwarz and Nicole (Josh) Krostue. They also have 14 grandchildren most of them residing in the 2nd District.

Curtis attended Fisher Public School and University of Minnesota in Crookston. He has farmed his entire life alongside his brother, his son, Chad, and his son-in-law, Travis. They farm approximately 5,000 acres in Bygland, Tynsid, Roome, Andover, Fisher and Crookston townships. They raise sugarbeets, soybeans and wheat in the Red River Valley soil.

Curt's public service includes two terms on the Roome Township Board as supervisor and 16.5 years on the Fisher Public School Board, the last few as chair. He also served on the Minnesota Barley Council for many years as well as a few terms on the West Polk County Crop Improvement Association.

Other public service includes almost 20 years of service on the Sheriff's Mounted Posse with service in Polk, Marshal and currently in Hubbard County

More recently, Knutson served on the American Crystal Board of Directors for 12 years, five years as chairman of the Ag Committee, two years as chairman of the Operations Committee, two years as vice-chair of the board and two years



**Curtis Knutson**

as chair. He also served as chair of United Sugars, the sugar marketing branch of the company. He has served as chair of Midwest Agri-Commodities, the byproduct marketing branch of the company.

Curtis also served on the American Sugarbeet Growers Association, which focuses on lobbying for all growers in the United States. This involved many lobbying trips to Washington, D.C.

Currently, Curtis is seated on the Midwest Ag Council, a group of agriculture leaders that was initiated by Collin Peterson.

Curtis and Kim had the honor of being chosen the Valley Emerging Leaders (King Agassiz) in 1996. This year they were awarded the Outstanding Farm Leadership Award for West Polk County.

He and Kim are members of the Fisher Lutheran Church. They have both served the church in numerous ways.

## MSTRWD managers appointed

The Marshall County Board of Commissioners has appointed three new members to the Board of Managers of the Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District.

Lein Schiller, Argyle, received a three-year appointment to succeed John Nelson, Oslo, while Eric Johnson and Joe McGregor, both of Warren,

were appointed to complete the two years that remained on open positions.

Bill Peterson, Middle River, serves as chair of board. The vice chair now is Robert Kovar, East Grand Forks. Keith Szczepanski, Stephen, is the treasurer; Brad Blawatt, Viking, is secretary; and Johnson is assistant secretary-treasurer.

## Warren Strandell

Warren Strandell was a 30-year veteran of newspaper journalism before he combined work in the public relations/communications field with service on the Polk County Board.

Growing up in Warren, he went from season to season playing all the sports while in high school earning all-conference in football, being a captain in basketball, winning the half-mile event at the District 31 track meet, and then running one leg of the mile relay team that won at the Region 8 level and competed in the state track meet.

After graduating from high school, Warren joined the 231st Medical Co. (Clearing), a North Dakota National Guard unit based in Grand Forks. He completed basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and training in the medical field at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Tex., before studying accounting at Interstate Business College in Fargo.

The 231st Medical Co. was recalled to active duty in 1961 and served as backup to medical units that were in Germany.

Warren's newspaper career included stops at the Warren Sheaf, The Daily Herald in Austin, Minn., The Evening Tribune in Albert Lea, Minn., and 10 years at Grand Forks Herald (serving as president of the North Dakota Associated Press Editors in 1976), all before he and his wife Annie started The Exponent in the basement of their home in East Grand Forks in 1979. They sold the newspaper in early 1993.

Warren then spent 4 years as director of public relations at Simmons Advertising in Grand Forks. Later, after starting Strandell News Services, he wrote several books including personal biographies, wrote both the East Grand Forks centennial and 125-year anniversary history books, and wrote a business history book.

As a commissioner, Warren serves on several regional government boards. He is chair of the Regional Corrections Board that oversees Tri-County Community Corrections' (TCCC) operation of the Northwest Regional Corrections Center jail, the Red River Valley



**Warren Strandell**

Juvenile Center, and the three-county (Polk, Norman and Red Lake) Probation Department.

He is also chair of the Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization, chair of Minnesota Department of Transportation-District 2 Area Transportation Partnership, chair of the Northwest Regional Development Commission's (NWRDC) Transportation Advisory Committee. He is vice chair of the seven-county NWRDC and of its Executive Board.

Polk County committee assignments include those dealing with Emergency Preparedness, Public Safety, Buildings, and Hazardous Mitigation. He is the current chair of the County Social Services Board and vice chair of County Board.

Other work includes serving on advisory boards of the 8-county Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force, on the 7-county Regional Emergency Communications Board, and on the Red Lake Watershed District Advisory Committee.

At the state level, Warren is a member of the Association of Minnesota Counties' Public Safety Policy Committee and has served as state chair of its General Government Policy Committee.

He originated and has been editor of the Polk County Newsletter for the past 25 years.

Warren, with his late wife, Annie, has three sons, Jeff, Kary and Jon (Heather), and four grandsons, Travis, Trevor, Sam, and Leo.

# Commissioner candidates - District 4

## Dennis Boucher

After growing up on the family farm west of Brooks and graduating from Plummer High School in 1967, Dennis Boucher was drafted into the U.S. Army. After initial training, he served a year with a heavy artillery unit in Vietnam.

Following his discharge, he assisted in the family farming operation while also doing mechanical maintenance at Bradley Motors in Erskine and later at Winger Implement in Winger. In 1974, Dennis had the opportunity to purchase a milk truck. This resulted in the establishment of a couple of routes. He expanded his trucking business to include the hauling of propane, grain, anhydrous ammonia, and jet fuel to a variety of locations.

During a rough winter, a neighbor suggested to Dennis that he should purchase a grader for Lessor Township. He did that in 1977 and has operated it ever since. Approximately eight years ago, Dennis sold the township road grader to the neighbor. He now operates a grader for the Strata Corporation where he went to work in 2001. With this firm, he had the experience of operating a rock crusher, dozers, backhoes and loaders at Tilden Junction for the next 10 years. In more recent years, Dennis has also had the opportunity to load trains along with the blading of the haul road. In addition, with the tech help that has been available, he has had the opportunity to build and maintain roads for Strata.

Dennis is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in McIntosh and holds memberships in the VFW Post in McIntosh, American Legion Post 200 in Winger, and the



Dennis Boucher

DAV in Crookston. He served on the Lessor Township Board in a supervisory position for approximately 10 years.

He served on the Win-E-Mac School Board during the 1990s, and currently serves on the King Town Farmer's Mutual Insurance Company Board. He is a resident of Lessor Township.

Dennis and his wife, Diane, moved to a farm site north of McIntosh in 1976. They currently reside in the dwelling Diane's grandparents built in the 1920s. They have five daughters: Chris Springer, Caren Hunter, Cameo Herem, Cassandra Anderson, and Caillie Darco. These girls now have families of their own. Nine grandchildren have joined the family.

Diane served as manager of the King Town Farmer's Mutual Insurance Company for 25 years. She worked in the accounting/bookkeeping capacity prior to management. Diane currently owns and operates the Boucher Insurance Agency in McIntosh, one of the many agencies that provide business for the 125-year-old company.

## Robots

Continued from Page 1

Everest Labs will be on-site at the end of September to review the various applications in which robots are desired at our MRF and determine the practicality of each loca-

tion to be served by their robotic sorters. After that information is obtained Polk County will conduct its due diligence on all options available to determine how to proceed. — **Jon Steiner, Environmental Services director**

## Joan Lee

Joan Lee, an organic crop farmer and retired dairy farmer from McIntosh, is the current county commissioner for District 4.

Born and raised at Princeton, MN, Lee graduated from Princeton High School in 1979 and then attended the St. Cloud School of Business earning degrees in junior accounting and legal secretarial.

Lee moved to McIntosh in 1986 when she married her husband, Mark. They took over the family dairy operation in 1989. In 2006, they decided to transition to organic farming. Besides the dairy, they raised hay, corn, soybeans, oats and wheat. In 2014, they sold their dairy herd and concentrated on raising organic hay, corn and oats.

Lee has been very involved in her community. She has been a leader for 4-H, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, a Sunday School teacher and will be starting her 23rd year of teaching Release Time classes. She has been organist at Salem Lutheran Church for 25 years. She has been involved in Farm Bureau, serving as chair of Minnesota Farm Bureau Promotion and Education and also sitting on the organization's board of directors. She is currently the secretary/treasurer of the East Polk County Farm Bureau. The Lee family has hosted the Polk County Breakfast on the Farm for 15 years.

As a commissioner, Lee serves on many committees and is the current chair of the County Board. She also serves on the county personnel, finance, and negotiations committees. Lee is currently chair of the Solid Waste Committee, Household Hazardous Waste, Agassiz Trail, and the Wild Rice/ Marsh 1 Watershed 1 Plan. She is vice chair of the Clearwater 1 Watershed 1 Plan, vice chair of the Polk-Norman-Mahnomon Community Health Board and treasurer of the East Polk County DAC. Other committees include Polk County Aquatic Invasive Species, Polk County Extension, and the Inter-County Community Council.

Lee serves on the Association of Minnesota Counties Health and Human Services Committee, Education and Training Committee, and FUTURES. She



Joan Lee

also represents the local community health board on the State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC). She was elected to represent the northwestern part of the state on the SCHSAC executive committee.

At the federal level, Lee represents the state of Minnesota on the EPA Local Government Advisory Committee and the Small Communities Advisory Committee.

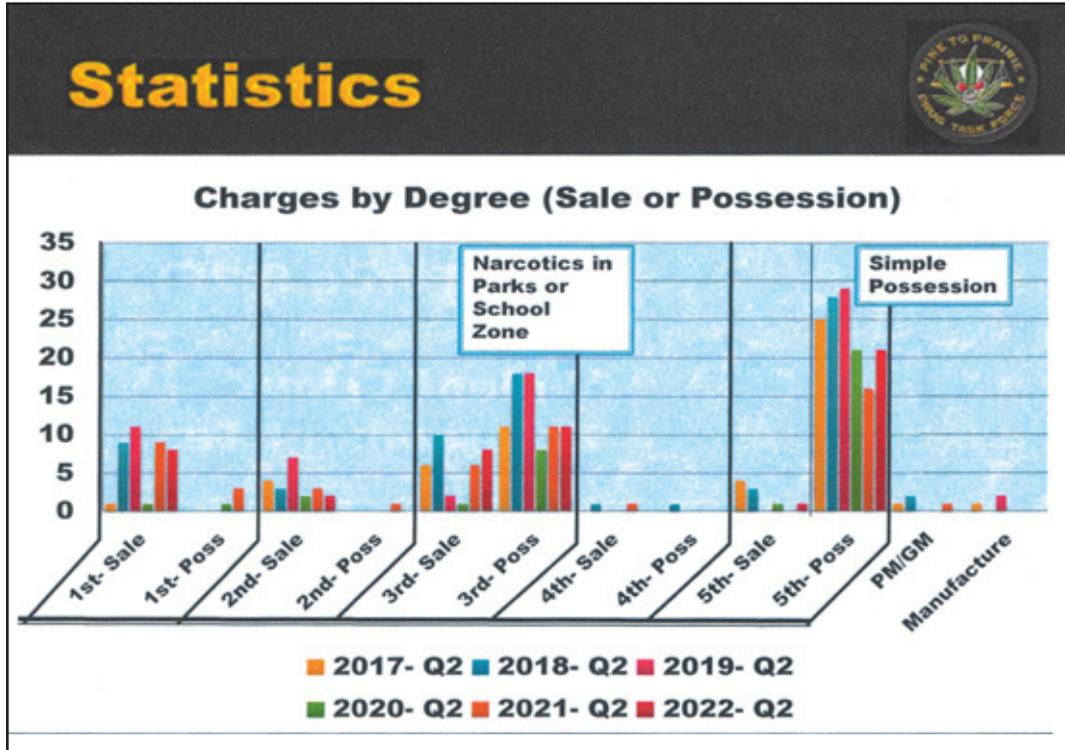
She was a member of the Minnesota Agricultural Rural Leadership program, Class VII and has served on the MARL Board of Directors. Lee has been vice chair for the Polk County American Dairy Association and coordinator of the local Dairy Princess program. The Lee family was honored in 1999 with the Polk County Dairy Association's Pitcher Award for outstanding service to the dairy industry.

Lee was the 1999 Polk County Farm Woman of the Year and runner-up for Red River Farm Woman of the Year. The Lee family was awarded the Red River Valley Dairymen's Association Award in 1996. In 2001, the Lee family represented East Polk County as the Farm Family of the Year and in 2005, the family was named the Northwest Dairy Day Outstanding Dairy Farm Family. The Lee family was named the Red River Valley Development Association Outstanding Farm Leaders in 2019 for East Polk County.

Lee and her husband have three children: Rebecca (Keith) Kleven, Joseph (Kelly) Lee, and Samantha (Kevin) Caron.

# Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force

Valuation total now up to **\$6.242 billion**



As determined by the Polk County Assessor for the purpose of assessing property taxes that will be payable in 2023, the 2022 valuation of real estate in the county now totals \$6,242,929,500.

This new total amount of valuation represents an increase of \$362,301,300 over 2021, or about 6.2 percent.

Of the new 2022 total valuation amount:

- 52.7% is for tillable agricultural lands.
- 7.2% is for all other agricultural property.
- 28.4% is for residential properties.
- 5.6% is for seasonal recreational properties.
- 2.4% is for commercial properties.
- 2.0% is for industrial properties.
- 3.4% is for building sites (rural homes and garages on 1 acre \*).
- 1.8% is for "all other" property classifications.

New construction accounted for \$33,417,800 of the total valuation.

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

Note — the figures above are based on the 2022 PRISM 2 report (Final).

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

\* — Included in "all other" agricultural property

Updated: Sept. 23, 2022

## Significant Cases:

- Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force received information about a drug dealer who was operating near a school in Crookston offering a literal menu of types of drugs that he could provide to prospective buyers. A search warrant and arrest ended his sales career.

- During a large-scale investigation into fentanyl overdoses, Pine to Prairie officers identified another independent

source of drugs that resulted in the seizure of 160 M30 fentanyl pills that had come from California.

- A Thief River Falls man, James Michael Morin, 24, pled guilty in Pennington County District Court on May 12 to third degree murder for supplying the fentanyl that led to the overdose death of a St. Hilaire woman in 2021. Sentencing was scheduled for Aug. 3.

## Emerging Trends:

### No. 1 concern: Meth

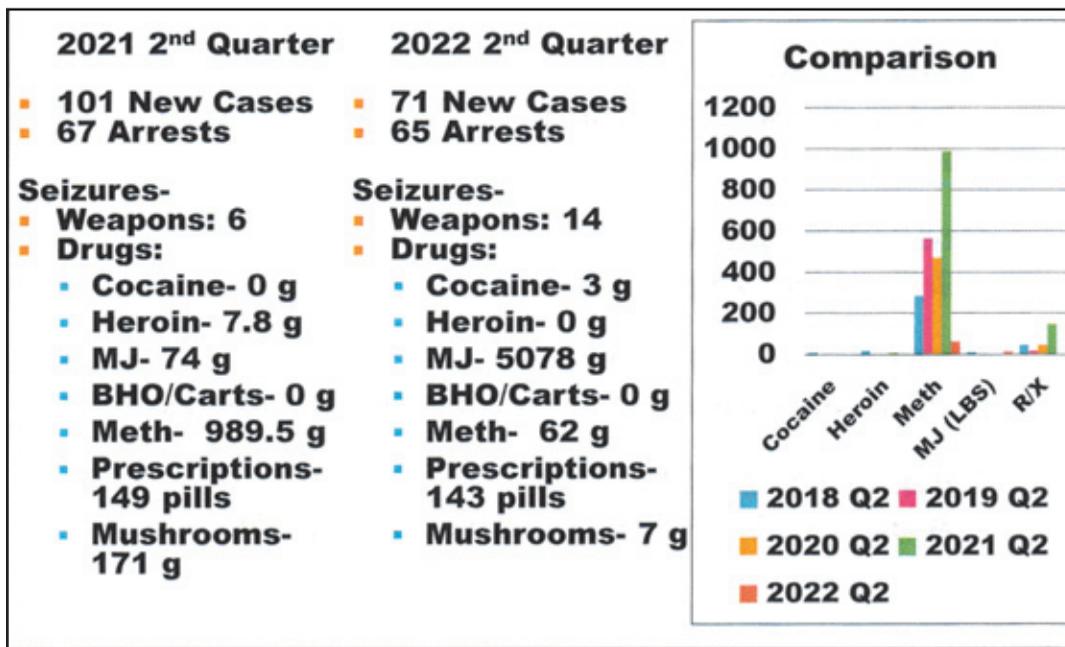
M Box 30 fentanyl pills have caused 4 fatalities and 5 non-fatal overdoses since Jan. 1.

### Searches:

32 consent searches  
26 search warrants

### Coordinated Efforts:

Assisted 3 other task forces units, counties, cities, federal agents, and Bureau of Criminal Apprehension



## As top emergency manager in Minnesota

# Beauchane honored at state conference

*Joe Kelly, director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, made the following remarks at the Minnesota State Emergency Management Conference in April:*

We finish the 57th annual with the traditional awards ceremony. It is my pleasure to recognize Jody Beauchane as “2021 Emergency Management Professional of the Year.”

Jody has been one of the most effective and dependable county emergency managers since he was appointed in 2015. Jody learned the emergency management profession quickly and well.

He has led Polk County through the response and recovery of three presidentially declared major disasters



**Jody Beauchane**

and one gubernatorial state disaster. But the primary rationale for this award was an undeclared event – protecting and preserving public safety during the construction project to replace the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline.

When it became obvious that

multi-jurisdictional coordination and mutual support was needed for that project, Jody agreed to host a regional emergency operations center (EOC) at Polk County Sheriff’s Office. It was a big lift. Jody and Polk County Sheriff’s Office didn’t have to step forward and take such a significant leadership role, but they did. It was the right thing to do and it worked very well.

The replacement project was completed without any major public safety incidents and the regional EOC was an important factor and its success. One of the most important lessons learned from Line 3, and a best practice going forward, is the use of regional EOCs for major multi-county events.

Jody continues to do great work for the citizens of Polk

County. When flooding conditions worsened this spring, Jody reached out directly to me and secured state help, most importantly the assistance of the Minnesota National Guard with emergency protective measures, most notably in the cities of Crookston and Fisher.

As the floodwaters receded, Jody expertly coordinated the preliminary damage assessment (PDA) of Polk County that verified nearly \$2.3 million in damages and response costs that will be eligible for reimbursement by FEMA and the state under what, I assume, is a forthcoming federal major disaster declaration. Jody’s recent actions validate my earlier recognition of his excellent work.

Jody is a great emergency manager and I appreciate him.

## COVID vaccination OK for young

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for all people 6 months and older. This includes people with underlying medical conditions; People who have had COVID-19, are pregnant, or are immunocompromised; and those of different ages, races, and ethnicities.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone stay up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination, including all primary series doses and boosters for their age group:

- Ages 6 months through 4 years should get all COVID-19 primary series doses,
- Ages 5 years and older should get all primary series doses, and updated COVID-19 boosters if eligible.

People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised have different recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines, including boosters. See the CDC website “COVID-19 Vaccines for People Who Are Moderately or

Severely Immuno-compromised” and visit with your medical provider for more information.

For people ages 12 years and older, the only authorized mRNA booster is the updated (bivalent) booster. People ages 12 years and older can no longer get the original (monovalent) mRNA booster.

**Bivalent Boosters:**

On Sept. 1, 2022, the CDC announced updated recommendations for Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 boosters for people age 12 and older. The updated booster dose is a bivalent formula that both boosts immunity against the original coronavirus strain and also protects against the newer Omicron variants that account for the majority of current infections.

As new variants of the virus emerge updated boosters are intended to provide optimal protection against COVID-19 and address waning vaccine effectiveness over time.

The Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines are now authorized as a single booster dose administered at least two months after either:

- Completion of primary vaccination with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine, or
- Receipt of the most recent booster dose with any authorized or approved monovalent COVID-19 vaccine.

Pfizer’s updated booster is authorized for adults 18 and older.

If you are eligible to receive a bivalent booster, contact your healthcare provider or schedule an appointment on the Polk County Public Health website.

For the most up to date COVID-19 vaccine booster information visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html#recommendations>.

— Sarah Reese, Public Health director



### 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 are committing fraud. 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 ext. 2249  
YOU CAN REMAIN  
ANONYMOUS**

# Polk County GIS Department wins international award

Polk County GIS Department staff members Rick Thompson and Nathan Smith received the prestigious Esri Special Achievement in GIS (SAG) Award at the 2022 Esri International User Conference in San Diego, CA in July. The technology industry award recognizes the innovative use of geographic information systems (GIS).

The GIS Department Esri is the global market leader in geographic information systems (GIS) technology which is used by most all local governments across the U.S. Esri software is used for mapping and spatial analysis, helping counties share information with residents and providing “location intelligence” to accomplish tasks in areas such as property assessment, public works, emergency management and elections.

Polk County GIS has been a leader in the use of GIS technology among local governments — particularly smaller size governments — for decades.

It pioneered the use of a GIS-based “hub” to help ensure fair property assessment with its “Equitable Property Value Hub” (Equitable Property Value | Polk County, Minnesota (arcgis.com)).

This same technology is used by the county to share county road information with its “Roads and Highways Hub” (Roads and Highways | Polk County, Minnesota (arcgis.com)).

The public can find or request a rural address with the “Addressing Hub” (Addressing | Polk County, Minnesota



Polk County GIS Department members Rick Thompson, left, and Nathan Smith, right, were congratulated by Jack Dangermond, president of ESRI, after being selected as winners of the 2022 Special Achievement Award at the Esri International User Conference in San Diego, Calif., in July.

(arcgis.com)).

Local voting locations and information can be found with the “Promoting Transparent Elections Hub” (Promoting Transparent Elections | Polk County, Minnesota (arcgis.com)).

Sharing free public data, tools and resources has become very easy with the “Open Data Portal Hub” (Open Data Portal | Polk County | Minnesota (arcgis.com)).

Rick Thompson, Polk County GIS coordinator, has continually expanded the county’s GIS program to improve the efficiency of many processes that are vital to its daily operations, and to make sure residents can find important information without having to call or visit county offices. This accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote services were

widely implemented as an alternative to close contact in an office.

Thompson and with GIS specialist Nathan Smith received the award at a ceremony in San Diego, CA on July 13t. They were joined by team members from Pro-West & Associates, a GIS services business based in Walker, MN, that collaborates with the county to help achieve its GIS goals.

Thompson commented: “We are very thankful to receive this award from Esri recognizing not just the work of the county but our community, which is embracing the benefits of GIS technology to enhance our daily lives. Polk County is a great place to live and seeing it represented on an international stage is a great accomplishment.

“GIS has become a vital tech-

nology for Polk County staff and residents. It makes us more efficient as an organization, which benefits taxpayers, and allows us to spend more time focusing on work that moves our community forward and brings value to our residents.

“County residents can find a wealth of information at their fingertips using GIS tools. They use the technology to find comparable sale prices for properties in their desired area or to see where road closures might affect their commute. Staff can use it to track zebra mussel infestations at public water access points or find information about roads during the survey process when planning construction projects. The list goes on.”

Visit Polk County’s Geospatial Hub: Polk County Hub (arcgis.com)

## 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
- Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell, vice chair
- Dist. 3 — Gary Willhite
- Dist. 4 — Joan K. Lee, chair
- Dist. 5 — Mark Holy

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

## County has earned reputation as a leader in GIS

# Comprehensive information is made available

Polk County has a reputation as a leader in the small government GIS (Geographic Information System), using the ArcGIS platform to realize its vision for a GIS program that empowers citizens and staff with comprehensive information at their fingertips.

It supports workflows including transportation infrastructure, public works, property valuation, emergency management and elections.

ArcGIS Enterprise forms the foundation of the county's infrastructure, with the ability to scale and take advantage of the full capabilities of Esri technology. This includes ArcGIS Hub, ArcGIS Online, and the Parcel Fabric for ArcGIS Pro. The County has deployed 5 ArcGIS Hub sites including a Geospatial Hub, Address Outreach, Equitable Property Value, Elections Outreach, and Roads & Highways, each housing a set of Esri COTS configured solutions to communicate valuable information.

With a fully leveraged, enterprise-wide GIS that supports users with powerful information, Polk County exemplifies the power of GIS for small government.

### **Business Problem Solved**

For residents and staff of Polk County,

finding answers to questions about location is easier than ever. GIS enabled the county to centralize its data, share information efficiently with staff and citizens, and improve services and internal workflows.

Prior to fully leveraging the ArcGIS Platform with tools such as Hub, ArcGIS Online solutions and Enterprise sites, getting the right information into the right hands was a challenge, especially when creating a complete picture of information involved multiple systems.

Significant time was spent responding to individual requests for information — information that is now available online, delivered via easy-to-use, self-service tools such as Hub and solutions. For example, a citizen can find comparable sale prices for properties in their desired area, or a staff member can use an internal application to efficiently track zebra mussel infestations at public water access points in the County.

### **Technology implemented:**

ArcGIS Enterprise  
ArcGIS Solutions  
ArcGIS Online  
Survey123  
ArcGIS Hub

### **ArcGIS Pro**

#### **Development Team biography:**

Rick Thompson, GIS coordinator, is responsible for development, implementation and maintenance of the county's GIS. Rick has been with Polk County for over 35 years, spending 20 years in the Engineering Department before becoming GIS coordinator.

For the last 10 years, Rick has focused on developing a complete GIS for Polk County that is built to fully leverage the capabilities of the ArcGIS platform. Rick has a B.S. degree in business management from Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Nathan Smith, GIS specialist, is responsible for maintaining Polk County's data. Nathan has been with Polk County for 12 years. He has an M.S. in geography and B.S. in environmental geography from the University of North Dakota.

Levi Webster, Information Systems administrator, is responsible for keeping infrastructure up-to-date and running smoothly. Levi has been with Polk County for 6 years. Levi has a B.S. degree in management information systems from the University of Minnesota-Crookston.

## Box culvert work could be delayed to 2023 but lots of roadwork completed, ARF money slated

The 2022 construction season for the most part is coming to an end. With lack of workers and shortage of supplies, Concrete box culverts will be delivered later than normal. So, the township box culvert projects may be delayed and constructed in 2023.

Otherwise, with the dry warm weather, construction went well on the following Polk County projects.

This is a list of what has been accomplished to date:

- CSAH 1 – Overlay – East limits of Beltrami to TH 32 (Fertile)
- CSAH 34 – Mill/overlay – North limits of Erskine to TH 59
- CSAH 35 – Overlay – TH 59 to CSAH 8 (north of McIntosh)

- CSAH 44 – Overlay – South County line to CSAH 1 (west of Fertile)

- CSAH 72 – Overlay – South limits of East Grand Forks to TH 220

- CSAH 73 – Overlay – TH 2 to CSAH 19 (east of East Grand Forks)

- CSAH 76 – Overlay – TH 2 to CSAH 17 (east of East Grand Forks)

- CSAH 106 – Box culvert in Mentor

- CSAH 113 – Box culvert in Mentor

- City of Mentor Harrison Ave. – Box culvert in Mentor
- Crookston Township road – Bituminous surfacing between old CSAH 11 (Highland Road) and CSAH 11 (east of Crookston)

Base One stabilized aggregate surfacing on:

- CR 206 from TH 59 to CSAH 41 (west of McIntosh)
- CR 211 from TH 102 to CSAH 12 (northeast of Fertile)
- CSAH 34 from CSAH 1 (west of Winger) to CSAH 36

The Polk County Board has awarded \$1.2 million in American Rescue Funds to the Highway Department due to loss of CSAH revenue in 2020.

The money will be used for the grading of CSAH 46 from TH 102 to TH 2 (east of Crookston). This will allow the contractor to install entrance pipes this fall and do any clearing and grubbing that is needed along the project. The remainder of the work

will be constructed in 2023.

Also, with this spring's flooding there were many areas that needed to be repaired. This work was completed either by Polk County forces or contractors. Thank you to everyone for their patience as it took a little while to complete most of the work with some still to be completed.

Other work that maybe completed this year includes township box culvert projects in Brandsvold, Crookston, Eden, Euclid and Grove Park townships. — **Richard Sanders, county engineer**

# Improving Rural Water Quality for the Long Term

Sarah Sesselman, PE, AE2S Project Manager

A regional water quality problem has a solution that will bring the west central region of Minnesota together to create a new rural water district with the potential to serve 14,000 people in Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties. The new water system will provide approximately 360 million gallons of safe and reliable water each year. The need for this project is clear when one considers the poor water quality in several areas of the three counties that will be served. In addition, much of the existing City water infrastructure is close to or past its useful life. There is a need for replacement of this aging infrastructure to ensure adequate water quantity and quality can be delivered to residents.

Unfortunately, we've learned that it is more common than many would say is fair, that residents living throughout west central Minnesota experience less than adequate quality and quantity of water service. This could mean any one of the following in residents' primary water source: arsenic contamination, critical infrastructure failure resulting in an entire community being without water for extended periods of time, and concerns about the expense of rehabilitating existing City or privately-owned water infrastructure such as treatment facilities, wells, and service lines.

The creation of the West Central Regional Water District mirrors a sister system across the border in North Dakota called the East Central Regional Water District. The first phase of the connection to North Dakota is already under construction. When construction is complete, the City of Climax will be served by the East Central Regional Water District.

As this first phase of construction is underway, the triad of Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties are following Minnesota state statute and guidance to legally form a governing body that is proposed to be named the West Central Regional Water District. The map to the right shows the proposed boundaries of the soon to be formed water district. Property owners within the service area will receive water service sign up information in the mail to determine the specific water needs and locations for the rural water system's design.

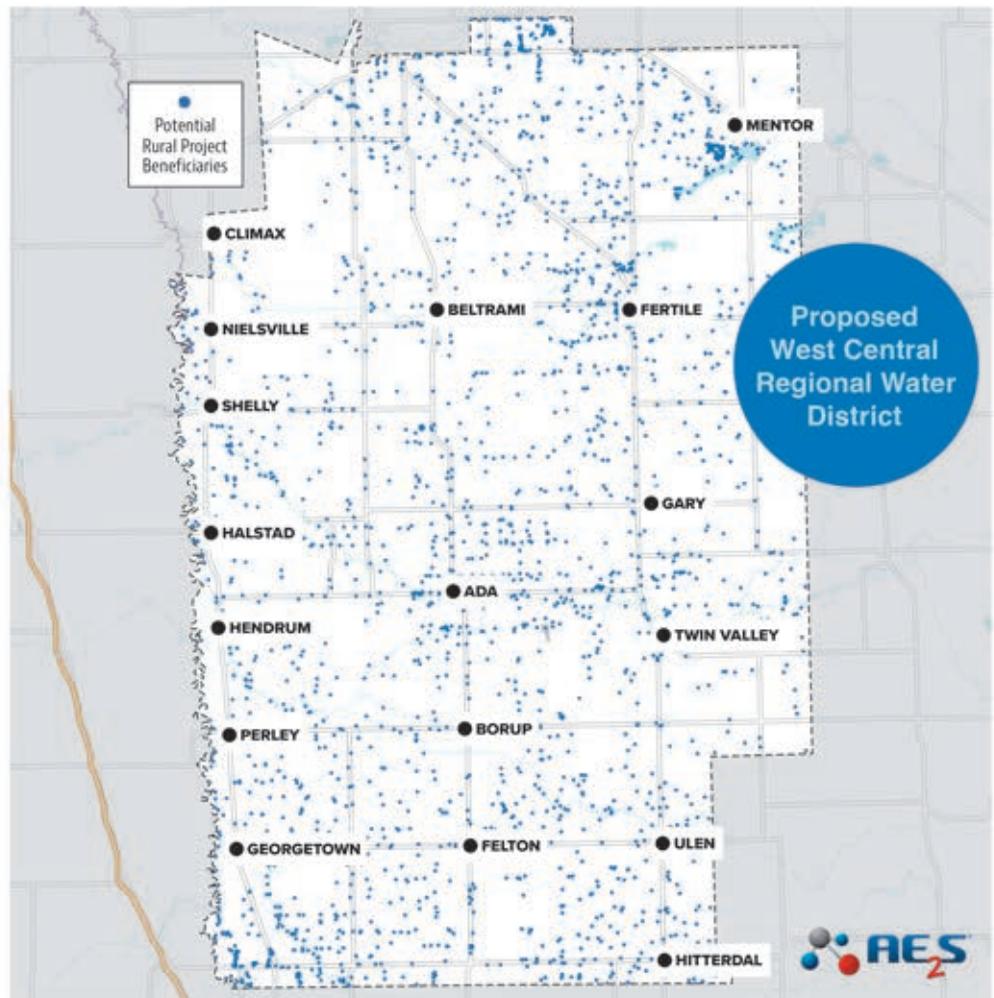
The mailings are expected to be sent out before the close of the year. The information gathered from property owners will be compiled to create an Engineers Report that will evaluate pipeline routes from the perspectives of operational, financial, and long-term need for the infrastructure. The evaluation of the alternatives will be the next step in determining how best to provide excellent quality and adequate quantity of water to all property owners who need one or both.

The word regional when it comes to rural water is easiest to understand when we use the phrase "economies of scale." A project like the West Central Regional Water District is intended to provide an essential need to a large population of people in a large geographic area. Regionalization often allows for costs to be distributed more evenly, in turn keeping expense to the end customer at a minimum. Further, new water supply and delivery

infrastructure will allow for many decades of safe water being delivered to the tap.

The creation of the West Central Regional Water District has grown legs because of the collaborative effort among the leaders of Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties. There is no better reason to collaborate than to take on a challenge that will improve the lives of this many people. It is exciting to know the opportunity for more rural Minnesota residents to readily access safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water is in the works. Ultimately, high quality and adequate quantity water is crucial for the livelihoods of rural Minnesota residents and the region's economy.

Watch for the information to arrive in mailboxes by year's end. It is important property owners respond to the information request so the project's alternatives can be determined. We need everyone's input to ensure we're creating a water district that will serve everyone's needs.





A closed section of the MSW Landfill which is being placed under final cover. Vents have been installed and the synthetic cover has been placed. A layer of sand has been placed over the synthetic cover material, and a layer of black dirt is being placed over that.

Once both layers are completed and sloped, the black dirt will be seeded to promote deep-rooted vegetative growth to hold the cover material in place. The cover is intended to keep rain and snowmelt from coming into contact with the waste below it.”

*From placing final cover to preparing for expansion*

## Multiple projects are underway at Landfill

Multiple projects are occurring at the Landfill Complex.

The landfill is in the process of placing final cover over the filled part of the Mixed Solid Waste (MSW) Landfill. That project entails installing vents, a synthetic cover to shed water from infiltrating the waste, and placing soils on the cover and seeding it to establish long-term vegetation. That part of the project is now completed.

There is another project running concurrent at the MSW Landfill — the construction of Phase 14. This entails preparation of the subgrade, installation of a synthetic liner and construction of a new leachate collection system (rain/snowmelt coming into contact with the waste must be man-

aged as leachate).

The new phase, or cell has just been completed and approval to start placing waste in it has been granted. Due to inflation and supply-chain issues, the leachate tank portion of the project was delayed until November.

Another project, which is ongoing, relates to activities necessary for future landfill expansion and capacity. These activities have to do with impacts to wetlands located to the east of Phase 14. The process for gaining these approvals to impact wetlands has been ongoing for over four years with minimal progress to date.

Essentially, all MSW landfill growth beyond the Phase 14 area will have some

wetland impacts. Navigating the process for wetland impacts is generally difficult as the local unit of government (Soil & Water Conservation District), state (Board of Water & Soil Resources) and federal regulators (U.S. Army Corp of Engineers) all have their own processes and permit requirements to satisfy and not all of their goals and priorities align.

Making the difficult situation moreso, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) placed a Rare Natural Community (RNC) designation on a portion of the wetlands within the expansion areas, and a required flora/fauna survey of the area discovered the presence of a state

**Continued on Page 12**



Construction on Phase #14 in progress. To the right the synthetic liner is exposed. In the center the leachate collection system rock has been placed in the

leachate collection trench. To the left the sand drainage layer is being installed to cover the liner and leachate collection system.



Levi Webster



Tim Albrecht

## Webster is heading up Information Department

Levi Webster, a member of the Polk County Information Systems Department since 2016, has been appointed administrator of the department.

In that position, he succeeds Evan Bruggeman, who left the County at the beginning of September to become director of the information department at Lifecare Medical Center in Roseau.

A native of the Kennedy area, Webster graduated from Kittson County North High School in 2004 and from the University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC) with a B.S. degree in information systems and a minor on business in 2008. He first worked support for Microsoft, then at the RDO Corporate office in Fargo, and as a systems administrator at UMC before joining Polk County in 2016.

Webster and his wife, Stephanie (Genereux), have three sons, Jackson, James and Jeremiah.

Also in a new position in the Information Systems Department is Tim Albrecht, who began working in a communications role in August.

He graduated from Bismarck, N.D., High School in 2001 and, after joining the Army National Guard, was deployed overseas in Afghanistan for a year. Following active duty, he earned a B.S. degree in communications at the University of North Dakota in 2010.

Albrecht worked in the news department at the Grand Forks Herald for 10 years including time on the copy desk, in digital page layout for the newspaper, in writing and layout for the AgWeek publication, and in other roles for the Forum Publications news products. Later, he worked in a digital role at Acme Tools before joining Polk County in August.

Albrecht and his wife, Sarah, have a son,

## Landfill

Continued from Page 11

protected plant that was not thought to be in the area – the Carex Sterellis (Sterile Sedge).

The presence of the RNC and sedge have added further layers of regulatory requirements to be addressed. Over the last few weeks there has been movement from these wetland regulators to provide a path forward and lining up the approvals and documentation necessary for those regulators has been a top

priority for the landfill. Difficulty in getting confirmation from the DNR on the RNC and Sedge taking permits has been encountered, slowing the process considerably. It's hoped that all of these regulatory entities will work with Polk County and each other to gain the approvals necessary this winter. — **Jon Steiner, Polk County Environmental Services director**

## Melbye heads Taxpayer Service Center office

After working in different roles in the different offices of the Polk County Government Center, Sam Melbye has now advanced to the executive director position of the Taxpayer Service Center.

That's the position that heads up and coordinates the work that is done in the auditor-treasurer, assessor, and recorder offices... the offices that make up the Taxpayer Service Center.

### Succeeds Cote

Melbye, a Crookston native, is the successor to Michelle Cote, who also worked in those offices over her 34-year career with Polk County. Cote's time included being co-executive director of the Taxpayer Service Center with Rob Wagner when the office was created 11 years ago and then as the executive director after Wagner retired in 2017.

A 2001 graduate of Crookston Central High School, Melbye studied radio, television and film communication at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh before working at Digi-Key in Thief River Falls for five years.

He became a clerk in the Polk County Auditor-Treasurer's Office in 2011. That year he also earned a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Phoenix.

### Went to Assessor Office

After working in the Auditor-Treasurer's Office for six months, Melbye transferred to the Assessor's Office, first as a clerk and



Sam Melbye

upon earning certification in June 2012 became an appraiser. He worked mainly in the lakes and western townships areas.

Melbye became the Taxpayer Service Center supervisor and Tax System administrator in 2018.

### Learned a lot

"As the deputy director of property records and in other roles under Michelle, I have learned a lot and appreciate all the support from our staff. Now, as the director, it has been quite a ride. In my 11 years with the county, I have had six different titles going from clerk to director," Melbye says.

"I'm really appreciative of what Michelle and the county have taught me to do and the opportunities to learn the various roles in the county. And when there is something that I need help with going forward, Michelle has said she is just a phone call away."

Melbye and his wife Marley (Hanson), also a Crookston native, live in Crookston.

## After 34 years, it may not really be the end

# Did Michelle Cote end her Polk County career?

Michelle Cote ended her 34-year career with Polk County on Aug. 26.

Or did she?

"I might be retiring but I may not be through with Polk County or maybe I should say Polk County might not be through with me," she said while talking about the jobs and the positions that she has held with the county... with a total commitment to all of them.

It began when then Polk County Auditor-Treasurer Gerald Amiot stole her away from the Strander Abstract firm in 1988.

### **Came from Oregon**

"I moved here from Oregon in 1982. I completed my degree in business administration and marketing at the University of North Dakota graduating in 1984. By that time, I was married and we were starting our family.

Ricky and I have been married for 39 years now and have two children Jessica (Stanton) Wang and Jordan (Agatha) Cote and three grandchildren (Keyton, Kade, and Koldyn).

"Life has been good to us, which is something we never take for granted. Ricky works for Dee Manufacturing where he has been for 38 years."

In addition, Michelle owns a rental business with her son Jordan and does court appointed guardianship/conservatorship work. She also volunteers her time to organizations such as the Polk County Fair, Riverview Health and Fair Meadow Nursing Home.

### **Just to enjoy life**

"As far as retirement, I don't have any real plans other than to enjoy life at a little slower pace. However, I cannot explain it but for some reason I don't feel like I am done with Polk County. We'll see."

That "we'll see" isn't likely to be anything fulltime. It might just be helping out where needed, especially in an area where her experience and knowledge would be so very



**Michelle Cote**

important. Or it might be to provide some teaching. Or it might be more than that. Once again, we'll see.

### **From office to office**

Michelle spent her first year with the county working for Amiot in the Auditor-Treasurer Office. She then moved to the Assessor's Office for 17 years and then to the Recorder's Office where she advanced to the position of county recorder. She served as president of the Minnesota Recorders Association in 2017. In addition, she has served on the executive board of the Minnesota Association of County Officers.

When the Taxpayer Service Center was formed in 2011, Michelle and Robert Wagner, the county assessor, shared management of that new department.

As "director of property records," Michelle kept her recorder duties and also took on the responsibilities of serving as the chief election administrator, the administrator of ditch law, the recipient of bids for construction projects, equipment and services, the administrator of confession judgments, and the issuer of wine, beer, auctioneer, charitable gambling and other licenses. She also served as secretary of the Extension Committee and managed the License Center and became deputy clerk the County

Board.

In the new Taxpayer Service Center department, Wagner, as the "director of assessment services," expanded his duties to include work with the tax levy, tax rates and the administration of tax-forfeited properties.

### **Took over**

When Wagner retired in 2017, Michelle inherited all of his responsibilities. Even though she is not the county assessor, she oversees that department.

For Michelle, serving as the administrator of elections for the first time in 2012 was a time of "panic. I had to learn on the fly. It was incredibly overwhelming. When the Primary Election was over and all of ballots were counted and results uploaded on Aug. 14, 2012, I danced on the counter. It was also my 50th birthday. The election team sang happy birthday to me at midnight. It was quite a day.

"I have learned with each election. One thing that I am very proud of is the manner in which we run elections. Everything we do is to ensure 100 percent accuracy of results."

### **Became a minister**

In addition to all of her other responsibilities, Michelle went through the process of becoming an ordained minister nine years ago so that she could perform marriages... 361 of them through July.

"The courts had become too busy in 2013 to do weddings.

That's when I went online to become ordained. It was a simple thing but important to be able to offer this service here in Polk County. All the revenue from performing weddings has gone to the county. All but two of the weddings have been done in the Government Center. Even during COVID we were able to provide this service. We just did them in the parking lot."

### **Converting documents**

Another accomplishment has been the scanning of paper documents to convert them to electronic records. That has included over 100,000 Sheriff's Department records along with Public Health records, tax books, veterans' records, and more.

"I've helped other departments get started converting their records, too. It is more than just scanning paper; we need to ensure that the electronic record can be found in an addition to reviewing the process so more paper is not accumulated.

"Electronics records are much more efficient in that they are more accessible in addition to freeing up physical space."

About Sam Melbye, her successor, Michelle says, "I very much enjoy watching people grow in their positions... to give them responsibilities and to let them grow to their potential. Sam will no doubt do things differently than me and that is fine. He will do a great job."

## **Social Service Board officers change**

In an officer change that occurred in July, Warren Strandell succeeded Joan Lee as chair of the Social Service Board. Strandell had been the vice chair. The new vice chair of the board is Gary Willhite.

The positions of chair and vice chair for the Social Service Board are chosen in July, while the positions of

chair and vice chair of the County Board change at the beginning of the year.

The Social Service Board meets monthly as a separate body. It is made up of the five county commissioners and at-large members, Paula Waters, Crookston, and Cathy Gutterud, Fosston. Gutterud is secretary of the board.

# New law enforcement instructors at Northland

Northland Community & Technical College has two Criminal Justice alumni as new instructors in the program. David Lovly is the program's director and Randy Sondrol, who recently retired as a Polk County deputy sheriff, is an instructor.

Both Lovly and Sondrol graduated from Northland's Criminal Justice program under the instruction of James Jesme, who retired at the college this spring after 20 years of service as the law enforcement coordinator/instructor.

Jesme and Teresa Mattison, who served as a law enforcement instructor at Northland for the last 14 years before also retiring, built a strong foundation for the Northland Criminal Justice program, will forever be remembered as the individuals who provided criminal justice students with the education and training that has benefited so many of our local communities.

A Goodridge native, Lovly obtained his A.A.S. in Criminal Justice from Northland and his B.S. from the University of Minnesota-Crookston. He previously served with the Pennington and Red Lake County Sheriff Offices and was a member of the Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force. He had the



**David Lovly**

privilege to work with Northland students as a use of force instructor under former program director Jesme.

Lovly has worked alongside skilled officers and investigators in homicide investigations and drug-related and violent crimes

"This is a pivotal time within the law enforcement community in which adaption to the world we live in needs to take place," shared Lovly. "Respect must be implemented and we need to equip our new officers with the ability to be confident and feel safe once they leave our college."

Sondrol, who is from Erskine, adds over 32 years of experience in law enforcement to the program. Like Lovly, Sondrol also received his



**Randy Sondrol**

A.A.S. degree in Criminal Justice from Northland. He worked for the Polk County Sheriff's Office as a patrol deputy, investigator, narcotics officer, SWAT officer, and sergeant before retiring from the department this fall. Sondrol has been an adjunct instructor in the department at Northland for over 12 years.

"During my years in law enforcement, I realized I had the most satisfaction training Northland students and new officers in the department and watching them succeed and advance in their careers," stated Sondrol.

Both Lovly and Sondrol share the desire to build upon Northland's well-established program and want to advance it with the changing times and

hope that this can help put the profession in a positive light.

"In the big picture, I want to help turn around some negative views toward law enforcement," Sondrol says. "That will hopefully spark the interest of young people in the community to join the program and enter a criminal justice career."

Lovly expanded upon Sondrol's sentiments saying, "We must maintain the highest standards for our criminal justice students to provide the best for our communities. No matter what challenges we face, we must overcome our mistakes and do what is best for those around us and ourselves. As educators, we must strive to ensure that each and every one of our students is consistent, respectful and resilient as they enter this great profession."

Northland is still accepting students in the program for this fall semester. Interested students can visit [www.northlandcollege.edu/start](http://www.northlandcollege.edu/start) to complete the online inquiry form. To schedule an advising appointment, they can contact Northland Admissions at (800) 959-6282, e-mail [enrollment@northlandcollege.edu](mailto:enrollment@northlandcollege.edu), or text the college at (218) 496-3158.

## Building permits needed for almost everything

We would like to remind you that Polk County Planning & Zoning requires building/land use permits for all construction projects in the county. If you are planning building/land use projects outside of incorporated cities, please contact Polk County Planning & Zoning staff prior to construction to determine setback and ordinance requirements that may apply.

More information on building/land use regulations can be found on the Polk County website at [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) under the Environmental Services/ Planning & Zoning Department tab.

People sometimes forget to apply for a building permit or

don't think they need a permit for a deck, small shed, septic system, etc. However, permits are required for almost any construction project within Polk County.

Land alterations or landscaping activity in the shoreland or floodplain zoning districts may also require permits. Septic system permits involve obtaining a design from a licensed septic contractor as well as verification of soils through the permitting process. All "fixing" of septic systems requires a land use permit.

Landowners are responsible for obtaining all permits for projects on their property not contractors. Contractors who are

securing permits on behalf of the landowner must still have the landowner sign the permit application. Should a contractor tell a landowner that a permit is not required, please take the time to contact our office and inquire about your specific project.

Also remember that land use/zoning permits that aren't obtained prior to construction are treated as "after-the-fact" (ATF) permits subject to three times the cost of the normal permit fee plus an additional \$150 penalty fee, if applicable. The costs can add up, especially if a variance is required due to setbacks not being met. In certain situations, penalty fees may accrue to thousands of dollars,

or the need to be reconstructed or moved. It is NOT the best practice to simply do a project and ask for forgiveness. Many of these ATF situations result in wasted time and money as well as possible structure removal or court fees.

Make sure to apply for your land use/building permits early and plan projects ahead of time to avoid unnecessary delays or ATF penalty fees. Our office is more than happy to answer questions and assist you through the permitting process. For more information contact Polk County Planning & Zoning at (218) 281-5700. — **Jacob Snyder, assistant Environmental Services administrator**

# Grant to fund pre-trial supervision program

Tri-County Community Corrections (TCCC) was awarded a two-year grant through the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs in February 2022. The grant will be used to fund a pre-trial supervision program through the TCCC Probation Department.

According to the National Institute of Corrections "...there are 646,000 people locked up in more than 3,000 local jails throughout the United States. 70% of these people in local jails are being held pretrial — meaning they have not yet been convicted of a crime and are legally presumed innocent."

Local data is even more stark with 85 percent of the jail population at the Northwest Regional Corrections Center in Crookston consisting of people being held pretrial through June of 2021. The use of pretrial detention has increased dramatically in our jurisdiction as data from the Northwest Regional Corrections Center is demonstrated in the chart below.

*Average Daily Population by Court Status*

Time Frame	Under Sentence	Awaiting Trial	% of Population Awaiting Trial
2008 – 2012	48.82	57.71	54.2%
2013 – 2017	47.01	102.62	68.6%
2018 – June 2021	34.24	120.51	77.9%

Pre-trial supervision will include regular check-ins with a probation agent with the frequency of this contact being determined by the assessed risk of pre-trial failure. Offenders placed under pre-trial supervision will be subject to regular drug/alcohol testing and will be sent reminders of upcoming court dates in an attempt to reduce instances of missed court dates.

The overarching goal of the pre-trial supervision program is to reduce the number of people incarcerated at the NWRCC under awaiting trial status and to improve outcomes for persons who are under pre-trial status with the courts. — **Andrew Larson, executive director, TCCC**

# Sanders selected for work group

Polk County Engineer Richard Sanders has been selected to serve on the Technical Oversight Working Group (TOWG) for the Federal Highway Administration project that involves completing a High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) study update and report to Congress. It also involves developing an updated Manual for Selecting Safety Improvements on HRRR (required under 23 U.S.C 148 note, Public Law 117-58). TOWG activities for the project will take place approximately from October 2022 to August 2023. Work group members may be asked to review and provide expert opinions on analyses of the results from the literature review and survey (in Spring/Summer 2023).

# Free organics waste kit will allow collection for composting

The Polk County Transfer Station in Crookston has a new organics compost program aimed to collect organics and pet wastes that will allow Polk County residents to drop-off food scraps as well as household pet wastes for composting purposes.

Residents who are interested will receive a free organics waste kit that will keep food scraps and pet waste out of the normal bagged household garbage or littered all over the countryside.

The first step in composting is the collection of organics, pet waste and food wastes that naturally will compost in the right conditions. Polk County households are urged to stop in and get your free organics and/or pet waste pail kit. If interested, call us at 218-281-6445 or email us at [environmental.svs@co.polk.mn.us](mailto:environmental.svs@co.polk.mn.us). For more information about the organics program visit our website at

<https://www.co.polk.mn.us/> under the Environmental Services Department, "NEW Organics Program" — **Jacob Snyder, assistant Environmental Services administrator**



**Organics waste kit**

# Job Openings

Polk County Social Services is often looking for hard working and dedicated people to hire for a variety of positions:

- **Office Support Specialist:** Support daily functioning of the agency by helping customers at the window, answer phones, enter data into state systems and much more!
- **Eligibility worker:** Works with adults and families to determine eligibility for public assistance programs such as food, cash and health care programs.
- **Social Worker:** Work in a variety of positions... working with children, families, adults, disabled, and elderly populations.

Polk County Social Services participates in the Minnesota Merit System through the Department of Human Services. To be considered for hire, individuals need to be registered/eligible

to hold the position classification through them. To learn more about this process and be placed on a position register, visit: <http://agency.governmentjobs.com/mnmeritsystem>

Polk County offers a highly competitive benefits package including affordable healthcare plans through BCBS with attractive low-cost family healthcare plans, dental, vision, life, long-term and short-term disability coverage; flexible spending accounts; PERA retirement with contributions made by the County, vacation and sick leave, and access to many other health and wellness programs.

**Further inquiry** can be directed to Betty Solie, Office Support Supervisor at 218-470-8406 or [betty.solie@co.polk.mn.us](mailto:betty.solie@co.polk.mn.us).

## Polk County Community Level

Polk County's Current COVID-19  
**Community Level is Medium**

<b>Low</b>	Limited impact on the healthcare system, low levels of severe illness.
<b>Medium</b>	Some impacts on the healthcare system, more people with severe illness.
<b>High</b>	High potential for healthcare system strain, high level of severe illness.

**September 23, 2022**

TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future*

# Corrections Nurse of the Year



Polk County Public Health Nurse Kelsey, who works as the jail nurse for Tri-County Community Corrections, was honored by the Minnesota Sheriffs Association as its Correctional Nurse of the Year as a part of the organization's recent annual meeting.

Pictured with Kelsey are Andrew Larson, Tri-County Community Corrections executive director, at left, and Joey Pederson, Northwest Regional Corrections Center jail administrator.

## Staffing numbers improve to allow re-opening of closed unit in jail

Tri-County Community Corrections has seen an improvement in the overall staffing numbers for the Northwest Regional Corrections Center (NWRCC) that had required the closure of one housing unit in the jail in December 2021.

While some openings still exist in the corrections officer ranks, significant progress has been made and staffing numbers appear to be trending in the right direction. Because of this progress, the capacity of the Northwest Regional Corrections Center was returned to 200 inmates by action of the Regional Corrections Board at its June 2 meeting.

This does not mean that the jail

will immediately return to average daily populations which were often in the mid 180s prior to the pandemic, but it does allow for the re-opening of a housing unit and a slow and methodical increase in population over the next several months.

The reduction in capacity and closure of a housing unit was an unprecedented step that was needed to respond to staffing shortages. The population reduction immediately improved staffing challenges which were encountered as fewer staff were needed to manage the facility.

Unfortunately, the population reduction also has a negative impact on the agency budget due to limitations being placed on the

housing of per diem inmates from other jurisdictions. Tri-County has made a concerted effort over the last 10 years to enter into contracts for the housing of offenders from other jurisdictions such as Mahnomon County (which does not have its own jail), the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the U.S. Marshal's Service. The housing of per diem inmates generates a significant amount of revenue which helps to offset costs to the member counties (Norman, Polk and Red Lake). Average per diem inmate in the jail from 2019-2021 has averaged between \$1.1 and \$1.2 million. — **Andrew Larson, executive director, TCCC**

## Absentee ballots available

Interested voters can apply for an absentee ballot and vote at the Polk County Taxpayer Service Center right up until the day before the General Election on Nov. 8.

When requesting an absentee ballot that must be mailed, keep in mind that sufficient mailing time is critical. For application requests that are to be mailed the county election officials mail the ballot materials to the voter and the voter mails it back.

The U.S. Postal Service is recommending voters mail their ballots at least 7 days before Election Day. Absentee ballot voting began on Sept. 23.

Persons who would like an absentee ballot can either apply in person at the Taxpayer Service Center in Crookston or online by going to [mnvotes.org](http://mnvotes.org) where they will be allowed to apply online or print a paper application that will need to be returned to the county.

Residents of the City of East Grand Forks may apply and vote at the East Grand Forks City Hall.

People should avoid applying more than once for an absentee ballot. Applications are reviewed by the county of residence to prevent the possibility of duplication.

**Make a Difference..  
Change a Life.  
Become a Foster Parent.**

**Polk County Social Services  
1-877-281-3127**