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Produced by Steele County Times • May 2022

Klemmensen retires from BP Ambulance

BY HOWARD LESTRUD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The number 1,314 is a number Linda Klemmensen of Blooming Prairie will not forget. It's a magic number. The true meaning of this number is that it represents the number of ambulance runs she has recorded during her 20 years of service with the Blooming Prairie Ambulance Squad. Klemmensen and three others, Nola Sanders,

Ashley Boehnke and Naomi Smith, have retired during the past two years. Recognition due these volunteers has not happened because of the pandemic. The foursome was honored and recognized at a public open house at the ambulance garage on Tuesday, May 17. Klemmensen is the most senior of the four volunteers dedicated to ambulance service. A popular Blooming Prairie business person who logged over 25 years as owner of Sportstitch, Klemmensen said it was time to step away from the ambulance service and dedicate more time to her grandchildren and to her family. Klemmensen's Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) career started on Oct. 17, 1993 when she gained a realization that she wanted to help people in need. That October date was actually the day her father, Vyrle Krejci, died See **KLEMMENSEN** on 6 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

Veteran EMT Linda Klemmensen has been an integral part of public safety around Blooming Prairie for many years. She has retired from Blooming Prairie Ambulance to devote more time to family.



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BLOOMING PRAIRIE AMBULANCE



Members of Blooming Prairie Ambulance include: front row, from left: Laura Coughlin, Angie Laskewitz, Kathy Piller and Jessica Kremer; back row: Nick Nelson, Jay Iverson, Tyler Wilson, Jeremy Halvorson, Rick Hansen and Dan Peach. Not pictured are Paula Abbe, Kaci Cavallaro, Karissa Fawver, Jake Peterson and Isreal Wacek.

SERVICE: There are two ambulance units that service Blooming Prairie and the surrounding area. BP Ambulance is a Basic Life Support service. When needed, Advanced Life Support is available through Mayo

Ambulance in Austin and Owatonna.
TRAINING: The ambulance crew meets every third Monday of the month for meeting and training.
AREA COVERED: The service covers the

City of Blooming Prairie and surrounding rural townships. The coverage area is 144 square miles.
PERSONNEL: Jeremy Halvorson is the director of the ambulance service, which currently has 15 EMTs. Applications for

new EMTs would be welcome.
CALLS: The BP Ambulance crews responded to 306 emergency medical calls in 2021, down two from 2020.
SPECIAL NOTES: They also provided train-

ing and outreach to the Blooming Prairie community, including CPR training to Pine Springs Pool lifeguards as well as BPHS sophomores, now a requirement for graduation; blood pressure checks; ambulance

support at the Blooming Prairie Fourth of July celebration, BPHS football games, National Night Out and local events such as Holiday Dazzle and Gobble Wobble run; and has a ride-along program for EMT candidates.



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BLOOMING PRAIRIE FIRE

TRAINING: The second Monday of every month is a business meeting and the fourth is a training session where fire department members learn skills such as: rope rescue, CPR, propane and LP burn rescue and confined space rescue.

CALLS: There were 86 emergency calls in 2021, up a few from the previous year. Of those calls:

- 21 fires, including structures, vehicles, grass, brush and crops

- 41 rescues, including extrication and medical assists

- 10 hazardous conditions, including gas spills,

See **FIRE** on 6 ►



Members of the Blooming Prairie Fire Department include, front row, from left: Bruce Erath, Andy Kasperek, Mike Studer, Isreal Wacek, Jared Brown, Mike Trom, Dean Naatz, Jake Peterson, John Lurken, Bryce Schlichter and Justin Krell; back row: Ryan Hensel, Mark Dekok, Josh Toquam, Lee Peterson, Jay Iverson, Del Peterson, Jake Lembke, Lee Holtberg, Dave Wradislavsky, Matt Madsen and Jacob Gross. Not pictured: Rick Hansen, Mike Hoffman, Mike Ingvalson, Matt Kittelson, Dan Miner and Jeremy Wangen.

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Senator Gene Dornink
District 27

Prepared and paid for by Senator Gene Dornink, Hayfield, MN.

4 BP Ambulance crew members to be recognized at Open House

BY HOWARD LESTRUD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Four retired members of the Blooming Prairie Ambulance Squad will be honored and recognized for their years of service as a First Responder.

Typically, retired members are recognized at the annual Open House. Because of the pandemic, there were no open houses at the ambulance garage.

A feature article on Linda Klemmensen may be found elsewhere in this special public safety section.

The other three retirees agreed to field some questions from The Times.

1. How did you get started with BP ambulance crew?

Nola Sanders: Opportunity arose—I pursued a dream.

Ashley Boehnke: When I moved home from college, 2010 -- That May, took classes in December. Talked to Linda. Growing up here, knew this was something I wanted to do. I looked into it right way.

Naomi Smith: Actually, interested in it for many years -- Took class with daughter Ashley Valek - She was previously on the squad -- took EMT course

2. How many years have you been on the crew?

Sanders: 10 years. Retired October of 2021.

Boehnke: Started May of 2011 -- Retired Oct. of 2020 -- 9½ years.



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

The Blooming Prairie Ambulance crew has four members who have retired in the past two years. They have not recognized until now because of the pandemic which has caused the cancellation of BP Ambulance open houses. Shown from left are: Linda Klemmensen, Nola Sanders, Ashley Boehnke and Naomi Smith.

Smith: Member for 8 years. Retired April of 2019.

3. Why did you stay with this volunteer service?

Sanders: I enjoyed helping people and giving back to the community.

Boehnke: I enjoyed my time. enjoyed people on crew, liked different events, liked to help people in time of need; these are skills I will always

carry with me.

Smith: Because I saw a need in the community. I enjoy community service -- They needed people. -- I enjoyed the community. Education and training every month -- nice to continue to learn - enjoyed answering that call.

4. What has been the most rewarding on the ambulance crew?

Sanders: Inspiring my son Garrett Wradislavsky

to be an EMT and paramedic.

Boehnke: Helping people -- having grown up here, family here -- knew a lot of folks -- rewarding to be a shoulder to calm down people during chaos of their lives.

Smith: Just making a meaningful impact with the community. By helping people in need.

5. How important is training?

Sanders: It is critical. It can mean the difference of doing something that is wrong. It is very important to keep up with improving skills and proving the best care for patients in time of need.

Boehnke: Very important, initial classes teach you skills -- learn so much by going on calls. Keeping up with skills on how to handle situations -- trained every month.

Smith: Training is very important. guidelines are changing, medicine is always changing -- important to get updates.

6. What are the most difficult parts of being an ambulance crew member?

Sanders: It's a lot of training, dedicate lot of time to training. making critical decision.

Boehnke: I always have this question: How did a person turn out? -- We typically don't get to know that followup -- how did things go.

Smith: For me, I don't have a garage, we live in MN -- in winter, harder to respond. Another thing that is challenging is responding to a call, it is bittersweet. Challenging not to be emotional --I enjoy helping others when someone can't.

7. Why are you retiring?

Sanders: It's time.

Boehnke: Was 4 months pregnant, changing family situation -- less time to jump up and go on a call.

Smith: It's time.

8. What's your occupation?

Sanders: IT officer at MBT Bank.

Boehnke: CFS -- precision ag lead -- been with co-op 12 years, this position, four years. Work and farm with family near BP.

Smith: I work at Mayo Clinic in Rochester -- work from home -- traveled to and from Rochester - Work for quality in laboratories.



GENEVA FIRE DEPARTMENT



Members of the Geneva Fire Department are, from left: Taff Worrell, Levi Hanson, Travis Broskoff, Craig Christenson, Jon Warnke, Tyler Peterson, Alex Beenken, Wyatt Grose, Greg Bartsch, Steven Bailey, Lonnie Bartsch, Christopher George, Daryl Paulsen, Dale Boerhuis and Jon Bartsch. Not pictured: Jim Beenken.

Blooming Prairie Fire

◀ FIRE from 4

leaks, CO calls, chemical-related incidents

- 1 service call to assist other agency/mutual aid

- 9 good intent calls – cancelled en route or were legal burns

- 4 false alarm calls

AREA COVERED:

Blooming Prairie Fire covers 187 sections, or 187 square miles. It provides service into four counties: Steele, Dodge, Mower and Freeborn. Between the counties, nine townships are covered: Aurora, Blooming Prairie, Somerset, Summit, Ripley, Westfield, Udolpho, Moscow and Newry.

FIRE OFFICERS:

Chief Dean Naatz, 1st Assistant Mike Ingval-

son, 2nd Assistant Justin Krell, Fire Marshal Josh Toquam, Assistant Fire Marshal Matt Kittelson Assistant Rescue Captain Matt Madsen, Rescue Captain Bryce Schlichter, Training Officer Lee Holtberg and Assistant Training Officer Jake Lembke.

SPECIAL NOTES:

The department has 28 members after three retirements in 2021. Ryan Heimerman and Mike Johnson both stepped down after 20 years; Wade Johnson was with the department for 11 years.

Chief Dean Naatz said while there are no major purchases on the horizon for the department, it received a new pumper in February 2021.

Klemmensen retires from BP Ambulance

◀ **KLEMMENSEN** from 2 after collapsing while having communion at a First Lutheran Church service.

Knowing that Pastor Dick Hegal was a member of the ambulance squad, Klemmensen talked to him and then arranged to take EMT training with Joan McDonald. That training started in 2001. Klemmensen and McDonald received their EMT certification in May 2021.

Currently, Klemmensen is devoting time to her five grandchildren. That is a goal she accom-

plished and is enjoying after selling her business and stepping down from the ambulance squad.

Serves the community

Serving the community by leaving her business to answer an ambulance call, Klemmensen said she wanted to help people in need. "It has been very rewarding to have people come up to you and offer thanks," she said.

Most people who use the ambulance service "are scared," Linda believes. "When they see someone familiar, it gives

people a sense of relief," she said.

Since Klemmensen was in town with her business, she was able to regulate her time at Sportstitch. If she went on an ambulance call, she put a closed sign on the door and told herself that she will do the work later. "People were very patient with me," she said.

Klemmensen's entire family has been involved in the business, her sons Brad and Ryan and daughter Rachel growing up with the business. Her husband

Randy and her mother Ardis Krejci were also on the Sportstitch team.

Because of her involvement with the local ambulance service, Klemmensen said she has gained "a tremendous amount of medical knowledge" through training and actual calls. She said the city has always been supportive of ambulance service needs.

Monthly training

Blooming Prairie Ambulance Service crew members train once a month at the ambulance garage.

Klemmensen said she is appreciative of the many thanks crew members receive. She said sometimes calls, accidents especially, "can be very scary."

When Klemmensen started with the ambulance crew, the service was logging 150 calls a year. It currently is over 300, she said.

Klemmensen said there is always a need for new people to come forward and serve with the BP ambulance crew. She said, ideally it is the tool to have 16 people on the squad

so they can divide into four-person crews.

What's next?

What's next for Klemmensen?

"I just hope to hang out with family, do a little cleaning of closets and just relaxing and enjoying," she said.

Klemmensen admits that being on the volunteer ambulance squad requires a huge commitment, but she says it is rewarding at the same time.

"I feel lucky that I have met such fine people over the years."

BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE



Chief Greg Skillestad



Cpl. Jake Peterson



Officer Dan Peach



Officer Aaron Friesen



Officer Brad Busho



Officer Joseph Martin



Officer Nathan Taarud



Officer Rick Ellingson

MISSION: The Blooming Prairie Police Department is dedicated to protection of the city, as well as loyalty to the community.

PERSONNEL: Police chief, sergeant, corporal and several full and part-time officers: Chief Greg Skillestad, Cpl. Jake Peterson and officers Dan Peach, Aaron Friesen, Brad Busho, Joseph Martin, Nathan Taarud and Rick Ellingson.

SQUAD FLEET: The department has three fully equipped Ford Explorers. Each squad includes a traffic radar, audio/visual camera system, AED for

cardiac arrest emergencies and a laptop computer connected to dispatch to better assist on traffic stops and emergency calls.

NUMBER OF CALLS: In 2021, the department handled 2,479 incidents in Blooming Prairie, down from 2,640 the previous year. In comparison, there were 1,707 incidents in 2014. Here are the major calls for service that officers handled in 2021:

- 892 traffic stops
- 206 ordinance violations
- 48 suspicious activity incidents
- 32 welfare checks
- 18 juvenile complaints

- 15 vehicle crashes
- 15 DWIs
- 13 domestics
- 13 drug activity incidents
- 6 assaults
- 6 criminal sexual conduct incidents
- 4 unwanted persons
- 1 fight

COVERAGE: In addition to patrolling the streets of Blooming Prairie, the department routinely assists Steele, Dodge, Mower and Freeborn counties. The department also covers for the Minnesota State Patrol. Blooming Prairie has police coverage 24 hours a day seven days a week.



ELLENDALE-GENEVA AMBULANCE



First Responders on the Ellendale-Geneva Ambulance Service include, from left: Travis Broskoff, Jon Bartsch, Greg Bartsch, Alex Beenken, Lonnie Bartsch and Christopher George.

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MISSION: To provide a vital public safety service.

CALLS: In 2021, Ellendale-Geneva Ambulance responded to 217 calls, up significantly from 160 the previous year. The service also assisted Mayo Ambulance 27 times.

SERVICE AREA: The department covers five townships: Berlin, Summit, Geneva, Bath and Lemond as well as the cities of Ellendale and Geneva in Steele and Freeborn counties.

CREW: Formed and operated by a Joint Powers

Board, Greg Bartsch is the director of the Ellendale-Geneva Ambulance service. There are two ambulance rigs with one based out of Ellendale and the other in Geneva. Ellendale Ambulance has been serving the area for 65 years.

'Front row seat to circus of life'

For Trahan, patience and listening keys to 911 dispatcher

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

As Kathy Trahan worked one of her final shifts as a 911 dispatcher, she reflected on how she has come across many chaotic and tense situations, some of which ended in death.

On July 31, 2008, she was working in the Rice Steele 911 Center when a jet crashed at the Owatonna airport, killing all eight passengers and crew.

And yet another time she handled the plane that barreled into a farm house outside of Owatonna in June 2004 killing four people.

"I've had the front row seat to the circus of life," Trahan said.

After 33 years of fielding emergency calls and dispatching police, fire and EMS to those emergencies, Trahan is calling it quits. Her final shift was Friday, May 13. It's a long career that began in 1989 with the Faribault Police Department.

She later joined the joint dispatch center when Rice and Steele counties joined together in 2001.

Another memorable call for Trahan came in 1994 when Rice County sheriff's deputy Terry Hanson suffered a fatal heart attack moments after the end of a high speed chase involving two teenage girls. Hanson was the first Rice County officer to die in the line of duty.

"It's hard not to react, but I still have to do my job," Trahan said. "I have to maintain my composure," she added.

Perhaps most understandably after dealing with the officer's death, Trahan wants nothing to do with high-speed chases. "They make me nervous," she admitted.

Trahan has also found ways to prevent tragedy. One time she received a call from a man with a gun who wanted to kill himself. "I was able to talk him into getting the gun down and waiting for the deputy to arrive," she recalled.



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Kathy Trahan has retired after 33 years as a 911 emergency dispatcher, first at Faribault Police Department for 12 years and the remaining time for the Rice Steele 911 Center in Owatonna.

Dealing with distraught individuals is especially difficult as a dispatcher, she said. "It makes my heart beat faster even now after all these years."

She was always pleased when the calls turned out with a happy ending. And Trahan took great pride in what she was able to accomplish. "Knowing that we were able to get help to people at the right time and not

being a tragic one," she said.

But there were also comical calls thrown into the mix to help balance things out. Trahan recalled one time when a lady called the police because her neighbor shot a deer and it was hanging in the tree staring at her through the window.

"We just take the call and pass them on (to the officers)," she said with a smile.

Through it all, Trahan says she always remained hard working and took the job seriously. She often shared her knowledge with rookie dispatchers by training them. In fact, she said dispatching is a team effort and not any one individual.

"I think I'm really good at knowing everything that's going on that I need to know," she said.

Trahan chuckles

about how she became a dispatcher.

"I just answered an ad in the paper looking for a part-time dispatcher," she said. "I had no idea it was going to be a career."

After working part time for about a year, Trahan went full time and has been focused on being the point of contact for people needing help ever since.

Much has changed over See 911 DISPATCHER on 17 ►



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The Public Safety Trifecta

Ellingson is medic, cop and firefighter

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

They say if you find a job you love, you'll never work a day in your life.

If that's the case, Rick Ellingson hasn't worked since 1983.

That's the year the then-23-year-old became a paramedic.

Since then, he's become a law enforcement officer, a firefighter and just about anything else, it seems, to get his adrenaline flowing.

"Do I like the excitement? Yes," Ellingson said. "But if I say it's a hobby, that kind of downplays it. But I'd much rather go do SWAT or police work or fire and ambulance, than go fishing."

He covers nearly all of Steele County in some form of public safety service: He's still a full-time



STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

Rick Ellingson has been dealing with crisis situations for nearly 40 years in Steele County. Here, he assists with helping at a mock car crash at Blooming Prairie High School in an effort to teach students about the dangers of drinking and distracted driving. Besides being a police officer in Blooming Prairie, Ellingson is also a paramedic with Mayo Ambulance and volunteer firefighter in Medford.

paramedic, with Mayo Clinic Ambulance Service; he's a part-time police officer in Blooming Prairie and Janesville; and he's a volunteer firefighter with the Medford Fire Department.

"I just love the training," Ellingson said. "Whether it's arresting somebody or going to classes on new medicines or intubating somebody or learning new procedures ... I love the training."

A self-described planner, "it's exciting, planning and preparing for disasters," he said.

He responded to Hurricanes Katrina and Charlie, and has been to Haiti to assist in the aftermath of storms.

As a member of the Owatonna City Council for 12 years, he was involved in disaster drills that were See **PUBLIC SAFETY** on 15 ►



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MAYO AMBULANCE- OWATONNA



Some members of Mayo Clinic Ambulance Service in Owatonna are, from left: Lori Heslep, Erica Serna, Shawn Smith, Randy Nelson, Candice Darling, Dawn Winkels and Evan Schuld. There are 17 paramedics and EMTs working out of Owatonna.

LOCATION: Mayo Clinic Ambulance Service serves Owatonna, Albert Lea, Austin, Duluth, Fairmont, Litchfield, Little Falls, Mankato, Plainview, Rochester and St. Cloud. In

Owatonna, the service is based at 1005 S. Cedar Ave. **COVERAGE:** Mayo Clinic Ambulance provides ground and air medical transport services throughout Minnesota and

Wisconsin. The ground ambulances provide advanced life support with paramedics and emergency medical technicians. There are more than 70 ambulances in the Mayo network.

CALL VOLUME: Mayo ambulances respond to more than 70,000 emergency calls for service each year. The local service had 3,500 calls in 2021 throughout Steele County with the

exception of Ellendale and Blooming Prairie. **HISTORY:** On April 1, 2019, Mayo Clinic took over Gold Cross Ambulance, which had been part of Mayo Clinic since 1994.

CREW: With a roster of 17, the ambulance service has three daytime crews and two nighttime crews, with two people on each crew. There are four rigs in Owatonna.



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MEDFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT



Members of the Medford Fire Department include: front row, from left: Chris Ditlevson, Darren Hagen, Dakota Ellingson, Matt Mullenbach, Travis Nowak, Mike Prondzinski, Ben Finholdt, Nick Goodnature, Craig Helgeson and Kelly Markham; back row: Trevor Davis, Ben Maas, Mike Smith, Dan Simon, JJ Lawson, Eric Finholdt, John Anhorn, Mathias Heinrichs, Alex Schwartz, David Broin, Brad Hager and Chief Rick Hager. Not pictured: Rick Ellingson, Rich Kucera, Bo Noble, Mark Ristau, Greg Sanborn and Ross Taylor.

CALLS: Medford Fire averages 175 calls per year. About 60% are medical calls, with the balance including structure and car fires,

motor vehicle accidents, carbon monoxide and fire alarms.

OFFICERS: Chief Rick Hager, Assistant Chief Greg Sanborn and com-

manders John Anhorn, Craig Helgeson, Rich Kucera and Mike Smith.

HISTORY: The volunteer department began in 1939. Medford's first fire

truck was equipped with a 300-gallon tank, roof ladder and extension ladder, two hand hooks and a pump with a capacity of 200-gallons-per-minute.

FLEET: The department consists of three pumpers, two tankers and a personnel carrier.

COVERAGE AREA: The department pro-

vides fire service for 1,300 people in Medford as well as Medford Township and 18 sections of Deerfield Township.

OWATONNA FIRE DEPARTMENT



Members of the Owatonna Fire Department include: first row, from left: Mitch Terpstra, Leila Kath, Brooke Radel, Brody Dalland, Kevin Kreiner, Carlos Beascochea, Derek Wall, Dacota Gaffke, Miguel Chacon, Noah Tesch, Matt Kath, Jeff Boland and Reid Grayson; second row: Nic Thamert, Austin Haverkost, Matt Halverson, Tore Osland, Trevor Spatenka, Justin Brown, Ryan Seykora, Tyler Brase, Charlie Seykora, Ben Hanson, Tony Ringhofer, Dan Hed, Anthony Kozelka, Arik Brase, Maddie Seykora, Jake Hines, Bob Hager and Chief Ed Hoffman. Not pictured: Mike Gerhartz, Derek Strohschein, Willie Grubish and Jason Karsten.

STRUCTURE: Owatonna Fire is a combination of full-time firefighter, resident firefighters and paid on-call firefighters. The minimum staffing is one fire commander

and one fire equipment operator.

COVERAGE: City of Owatonna, population 25,641; Steele County townships, 3,627; townships: Clinton Falls, Deer-

field, Havana, Lemond, Meridan, Merton, Owatonna and Somerset.

MISSION: To save lives and property in a safe and efficient manner.

VISION: To be trusted

and respected by all members of our community in saving lives and property.

CALL VOLUME: In 2021, the Owatonna Fire Department responded to 434 city incidents, 95 in

rural areas, and provided mutual aid services in six incidents. Of those calls, 65 were for fires, 97 for rescue, and 68 were to clear hazardous conditions. The department also respond-

ed to 33 calls for service, 116 "good intent" calls, and 154 fire alarms, and provided inspection services and fire safety information, tours, and demos to hundreds of people.

OWATONNA POLICE



Chief Keith E. Hiller



Captain Jeffrey Mundale



Officer Joshua Lee



Officer Benjamin Metcalf



Officer Joe I Hunt



Officer Hunter Jenzen

MISSION: “All members of the Owatonna Police Department are dedicated to providing a safe and secure community through partnerships, leadership and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Policing excellence through our people, our work and our relationships.”

AREA COVERED: Owatonna Police covers the 25,641 people of Owatonna. It is an area of about 14.62 square miles in Owatonna Township. The department handles around 40,000 calls per year.

ADMINISTRATION: Chief Keith Hiller, Captains Jeffrey Mundale

and Josh Sorensen
POLICE STAFF:
Sergeants—Jason Pettersen, Andy Drenth, Tracy DuChene, Jason Matejcek, Zack Schumacher, Benjamin Johnson and Valerie Satre

Detectives—Christian Berg, Steven Bowman, Travis Ardolf, Derrik Quinlan and John Van Alstine

Patrol Officers—Joel Hunt, Brady Vaith, Matt Oeltjenbruns, Andrew Van Osedale, Melissa Michael, Alan Callahan, Alexandra Vogel, Casey Martin with K-9 Vegas, Luke Selvik, Travis Johnson, Benjamin Metcalf, Joshua Lee, Zachary Plein, Jeremy Katz,

Michael Brein, Anthony Malepsy, Kyle Martin, Matthew Lounsbury and Hunter Jenzen.

K-9— Vegas
COMMUNITY SERVICE OFFICERS: Brian Shaw, Gabrielle Flemming and Julia Hansen

SUPPORT STAFF: Kimberly Dub, Pam Roberts and Wendy Gasner

CHAPLAINS: Brent Carlson and Loren Olson

RESERVE OFFICERS: Michael Leyva, Steve Wrede, Gabrielle Flemming, Maddie Ziegler and Dietrich Piepho

RECORDS STAFF: Kate Schroeder, Renee Babcock, Rebecca Melchert and Adriana Gonzales



Sgt. Valerie Satre and Sgt. Ben Johnson were recently promoted to their ranks. Family members pinned badges on them, including Satre's father, Tom Schwartz, and Johnson's mother, Leslie Johnson.



From left, Owatonna Police Officers Kyle Martin, Zachary Plein, and Hunter Jenzen.



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The Public Safety Trifecta

◀ **PUBLIC SAFETY** from 10 performed as part of the Steele County Community Awareness Emergency Response program.

It's important, Ellingson said, "to plan for what could happen in the future and be ready for it, especially these days."

He teaches others the benefits of being prepared, as well:

"I'm most happy about the Explorer Post," Ellingson said. "We teach them everything: Police, fire, ambulance, SWAT; we go to SWAT competitions, first aid competitions. They get to start younger than I did."

He taught the EMT class his wife Deb took; she eventually got her nursing degree and is an RN in the Owatonna Hospital Emergency Department.

With his busy schedule, do they ever see each other?

"Well, yeah, when I bring patients in" on the ambulance, Ellingson laughed.

The couple has four children, including son Dakota, who also serves on the Medford Fire Department. He and his sister, Tasheena, also served in the military – possibly a result of watching their father's public service.

The overriding influence for the Ellingsons, he said, is their faith.

"We're a very close Christian family. With the jobs we all have, what I've seen and what Deb's seen,

and with Tasheena in Iraq, we pray a lot ..." Ellingson said, trailing off.

In fact, when he became critically ill and went into respiratory arrest about eight years ago while teaching SWAT procedures in Georgia, prayer played a role in his recovery.

"There was a prayer chain going, and the first thing I remember seeing (upon recovery) was all of my kids around me, hugging each other and praying," Ellingson said as his voice broke.

"It makes me thankful for life," he said. "I'm kind of a rough person. If you need to be tackled, I will do that. If you need to be loved, though, I'll love you, too."

"God has given me the skills to be a paramedic; if I can use every skill I have to try to save somebody, I'm OK with that, because ultimately, it's not in my hands," he said. "I do a lot of praying on every call."

Ellingson dismisses the notion that what he does should get special attention.

"Every occupation is important to somebody," he said.

So of his occupations: paramedic, law enforcement and firefighting, which is his favorite?

"They're different fields, and you care for people in different ways," Ellingson said, "but probably law enforcement. I love teaching, and I would like to teach more SWAT stuff, more shooting."



He realizes his service with the Medford Fire Department gets less of his time, thanks to the requirements of his two paid positions.

"I do love fire, and would like to be more involved, because I love rescue stuff," Ellingson said. He teaches high-angle and low-angle rescue, as well as water rescue, and has served as firearms instructor in Blooming Prairie.

"I'd do it all over again in a heartbeat," he said. "I wish I was 20 years younger again."

Now, as "a 60-year-old trying to be 20 again, you just have to do things a lit-

tle different, and you know you're going to be sore the next day," Ellingson said.

"My plan – and I don't know if I'll make it or not – but I want to work 50 years as a paramedic, so I could say I was a paramedic for half a century," he said, "but I don't know if my wife will let me."

Ellingson hopes that through all of his service, "people know I trusted God a lot, that I wanted to help as many people as I could."

He doesn't want to miss out on a SWAT call, or an ambulance call, or a fire call.

"My biggest fear is that I'll have to retire."





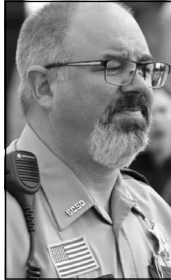
STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF



Sheriff Lon Thiele



Chief Deputy Scott Hanson



Sgt. Bill Youngquist



Sgt. Chad Forystek



Sgt. Mike Smith



Deputy Mary Ulrich



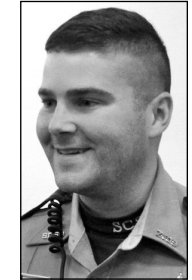
Deputy Tony David



Deputy Darrin Helget



Deputy Caleb Buck



Deputy Joshua Steinberg



Members of the Steele County Special Deputies include: front row, from left: Dennie Himle, Mary Delzer, Dietrich Piepho, Paul Hanson, Lewis Luedtke and Grant Duffy; back row: Mike Meyer, Ben Himbaugh, Adam Miller, Gene Linse, Charlie Berg, Wyonne Priebe and Jeff Kirchner. Missing are Gene Fisher, John Sweet and Tiffany Cumming.

AREA: The sheriff's office serves a population of about 37,406 people and 432 square miles. There are six cities in the county, including Owatonna, Medford, Ellendale, Meriden, Hope and Blooming Prairie. The county is divided into 13 townships.

2021 INCIDENTS: The sheriff's office handled 19,814 incidents throughout 2021. Of those, 3,133 were traffic stops, 71 child abuse/protection reports, 70 thefts, 43 DWI arrests, 18 burglaries and 12 assaults.

MISSION: The sheriff's office is dedicated to protect and serve the citizens of Steele County and support their quality of life. The office coordinates the efforts of emergency and support services to provide the highest level of responsiveness possible. Deputies also hold themselves accountable for their actions and take pride in a professional level of service and fairness to all.

SHERIFF: Lon Thiele is in his third term as Steele County's chief law enforcement officer. His office is responsible

for protecting citizens throughout the county, including the communities of Medford and Ellendale, which contract through his office for police protection. In addition to protecting and serving citizens, he supervises sheriff's office personnel, detention center, special deputies, mounted posse, water patrol and courthouse security.

Thiele was first elected to the sheriff's position in November 2010 and re-elected in 2014 and 2018. His current term expires in 2022.

ADMINISTRATION: Sheriff Lon Thiele, chief deputy Scott Hanson and administrative assistant Karen Meier.

SERGEANTS: Chad Forystek, Andy Seifert, Mike Smith and Bill Youngquist

SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES: Matt Borash, Tyler Brase, Caleb Buck, Tony David, Mike Diercks, Ben Frear, Jeffrey Gunther, Aaron Guzman, Darrin Helget, Jim Holton, Josh Horejsi, Jake Miller, Sean Robbins, Joshua Steinberg, Jayson Teichroew,

See **SHERIFF** on 19 ►



Sheriff's deputy Caleb Buck with his K-9 partner, Willow.



ELLENDALE FIRE



Members of the Ellendale Fire Department are, from left: Rick Johnson, Brian Flatland, Nolan McGowan, Logan Busho, Tyler McGowan, David Modder, Jordan Rosacker, Travis Ladwig, Matt King, Josh Otto, Dan Rhoades, Charlie Splinler, Pat Kruger, Joel Adams and Frank Altrichter. Not pictured: Shawn Larson, Allison Muillenberg and Josh Burgess.

CALLS: Ellendale Fire responded to 161 emergency calls in 2021, up slightly from 154 the previous year. The department assists Ellendale Ambulance with medical emergen-

cies. The department also responds to grass fires, car crashes and structure fires. **TRAINING:** Meeting the first Monday of every month for training

sessions, the department stays up to date and ready to help. **COVERAGE:** The department covers the city of Ellendale, 2 miles south, 6 miles west and 4

miles east. To the north, Ellendale covers 1 mile north of Hope. **PERSONNEL:** Chief Logan Busho, Assistant Chief Joel Adams, secretary/treasurer Tyler

McGowan, training officer Nolan McGowan, captain of safety Pat Kruger, captain engineer Frank Altrichter and lieutenant Shawn Larson. **SPECIAL NOTES:**

Though there were no retirements in 2021, Chief Logan Busho said the department has two openings. It's working on the process of building a new firehall.

For Trahan, patience and listening keys to being 911 dispatcher

◀ **911 DISPATCHER** from 9 the three plus decades that Trahan has been dispatching. When she started in the late 1980s, “we had one button to push on the radio and wrote everything down on a paper log,” she said, noting there was only a single computer to run license checks and no internet.

Now, dispatchers have multiple screens flashing information at them with emergency radios and computers at their side to get the information out to the appropriate public safety agencies. “Technology is the biggest thing that has changed,” Trahan says.

“With the radios and dispatching, everything is now on computer.” Even though the job can be incredibly stressful at times, Trahan found it’s something she enjoyed doing. “For some reason, I was able to hang with it,” she said. She considers han-

dling stress, being patient and good with details as the key qualities to her lasting in the job as long as she did. After thinking about it, she added listening to the list as well. She said getting good information for police officers is key to the job. Trahan, 58, admits as

she got older, she began to “feel anxious” when behind the controls at the 911 center. “I’m not as quick as I used to be,” she said, adding she would often start second guessing herself in recent years. “I want to leave on a good note and not a bad on.”

As Trahan’s career winds to a close, she said it “makes me feel real emotional” and fulfilled at the same time. “Knowing that I have been able to help people in the most dire situation and that I have been able to keep officers safe.”



RICE STEELE 911 CENTER

The Rice Steele 911 Center is in its 22nd year of existence. Jill Bondhus has been the administrator of the center since 2015. The agency provides public safety communications, mobile data computer service and records management support for all law enforcement, fire departments and emergency medical services in both counties.

MISSION: We are dedicated to providing quality communications for the Public and Public Safety Agencies. The Center will serve as the vital link between the public and Public Safety organizations through responsiveness and technical excellence while in partnership with our users and employees.

ADMINISTRATION: Administrator Jill Bondhus, operations manager Justin Austin, GIS coordinator Justin Fuchs, office manager Nikki Hable and shift supervisors Matt Collins, Derrek Mattson and John Wunderlich.

DISPATCHERS: Kathy Trahan, Lisa DeRaad, Kirk Oswald, Norma Hoffmaster, Lynai Torabpour, Christina Conati, Tim Siebsen, Katie Twaddle, Stacey LaPlount, George Brandtner, Mercedes Schillaci, Kelsey Wright, Ross Chambers, Amanda Rothbauer, Shannon Jes and Kelsey Cook.

AREA: Rice and Steele counties have a combined population of about 101,500. The center provides dispatching services for the following:

• **Law enforcement-** Rice County Sheriff, Steele County Sheriff and police departments: Blooming Prairie, Owatonna,



Jill Bondhus



Christina Conati

na, Faribault, Northfield, Lonsdale and Dundas.

• **Fire-** Blooming Prairie, Faribault, Lonsdale, Northfield, Nerstrand, Ellendale, Morristown, Medford and Owatonna.

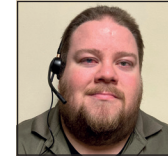
• **EMS-** Blooming Prairie Ambulance, Ellendale Ambulance, Mayo Ambulance, North Ambulance and Northfield Ambulance.

CALL VOLUME: In 2021, the 911 Center had a total of 178,987 emergency and non-emergency phone calls and 162,237 calls for service through its Computer Aided Dispatching system. The center's busiest hour of the day is 3 p.m. with Friday being the busiest day of the week. The summer months continue to produce the busiest call volumes for the center with August leading the way with 19,503 calls.

The Owatonna Police Department produces the most calls for the center followed by Northfield Police and Faribault Police. The center handled 6,541 fire calls with Faribault being the busiest fire department. There was a total of 9,439 medical emergencies in 2021. Mayo Ambulance (based in Owatonna) had the most EMS calls followed by North Ambulance (based in Faribault).



Derrek Matson



George Brandtner



Amanda Rothbauer



John Wunderlich



Justin Austin



Justin Fuchs



Kathy Trahan



Katie Twaddle



Kelsey Wright



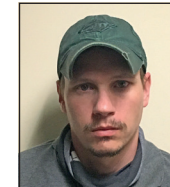
Kirk Oswald



Lisa DeRaad



Lynai Torabpour



Matt Collins



Mercedes Schillaci



Nikki Hable



Norma Hoffmaster



Ross Chambers



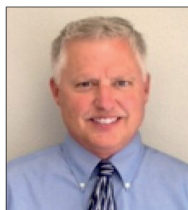
Shannon Jes



Stacey LaPlount



Tim Siebsen



Michael Bishman

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Some of the members of the Steele County Sheriff's Office include, from left: Sheriff Lon Thiele, Matt Borash, Sgt. Andy Seifert, Chief Deputy Scott Hanson, Sgt. Bill Youngquist, Kari Woltman and Tyler Brase.

Steele County Sheriff

◀ **SHERIFF** from 16 Mary Ulrich and Kari Woltman

COURT BAILIFFS: Jim Holton, Jake Miller and Jayson Teichroew

RECORDS: Renee Babcock, Jane Christenson, Adriana Gonzales, Karen Meier, Rebecca Melchert and Kate Schroeder

DETENTION CENTER: Anthony Buttera, administrator; Paul Prissel, assistant administrator; Jed Loftus, Joyce Prusha, Kevin Kozel and Greg Huebbe, sergeants; Linda Skala, Jesse Steneman, Ben Wilson, Seth Hummel and Chad Schlueter, corporals; John Anderson, Travis Avelar, Rusty Bailey, Michelle Bromley, Kristin Deplitch, Lucas Dreher, Steven Gjerald, Nick Golbuff, Sean Grivette, Matthew Gwin, Mya Johnson, Bernadette Kehler, Adil Lebgue, Andy Nelson, Brian Rinehart, Steve Schulz, Matthew Summer, Katelyn Tollefson and Michael Witter, correctional officers; Cindy Fowler, program coordinator; Dawn Grunklee, programs assistant; Leah Kent, nurse and Nancy Gjerald and Lisa Risch, support staff.

SPECIAL DEPUTIES: Sgt. Lewis Luedtke, Sgt. Adam Miller, coordinator Wyonne Priebe, Charlie Berg, Tiffany Cumming, Rusty Bailey, Michelle Bromley, Kristin Deplitch, Lucas Dreher, Steven Gjerald, Nick Golbuff, Sean Grivette, Matthew Gwin, Mya Johnson, Bernadette Kehler, Adil Lebgue, Andy Nelson, Brian Rinehart, Steve Schulz, Matthew Summer, Katelyn Tollefson and Michael Witter, correctional officers; Cindy Fowler, program coordinator; Dawn Grunklee, programs assistant; Leah Kent, nurse and Nancy Gjerald and Lisa Risch, support staff.

MOUNTED POSSE: Capt. Tony Schwering, 1st Lt. Jill Malecha, 2nd Lt. Anna Schultz, Sgt. of Arms John Gerold, Mike Keinz, warrant officer, Joe Schwering, past captain, Michelle Darrah, Mary Delzer, Tim Hager, Tom Hager, Mike Haubenschild, Monica Heine, Kyle Jakel, Skyla Jakel, Jodie Keinz, Kay Klemmer, Wendy Knudtson, Robert Malecha, Duane Peltz, Becky Schwering and Marilyn Schwering

CELEBRATE THE RED, WHITE & BLUE IN 2022

WE HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE... Thanks to all the police, sheriff, fire, and EMS departments that keep everyone safe each year at the **Steele County Free Fair** as well as the rest of the year. Your dedication and service are invaluable in maintaining the quality of life we all have come to enjoy... Thank you, for all you do!

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Thanks for all you do in keeping Cargill and the rest of Blooming Prairie safe!



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