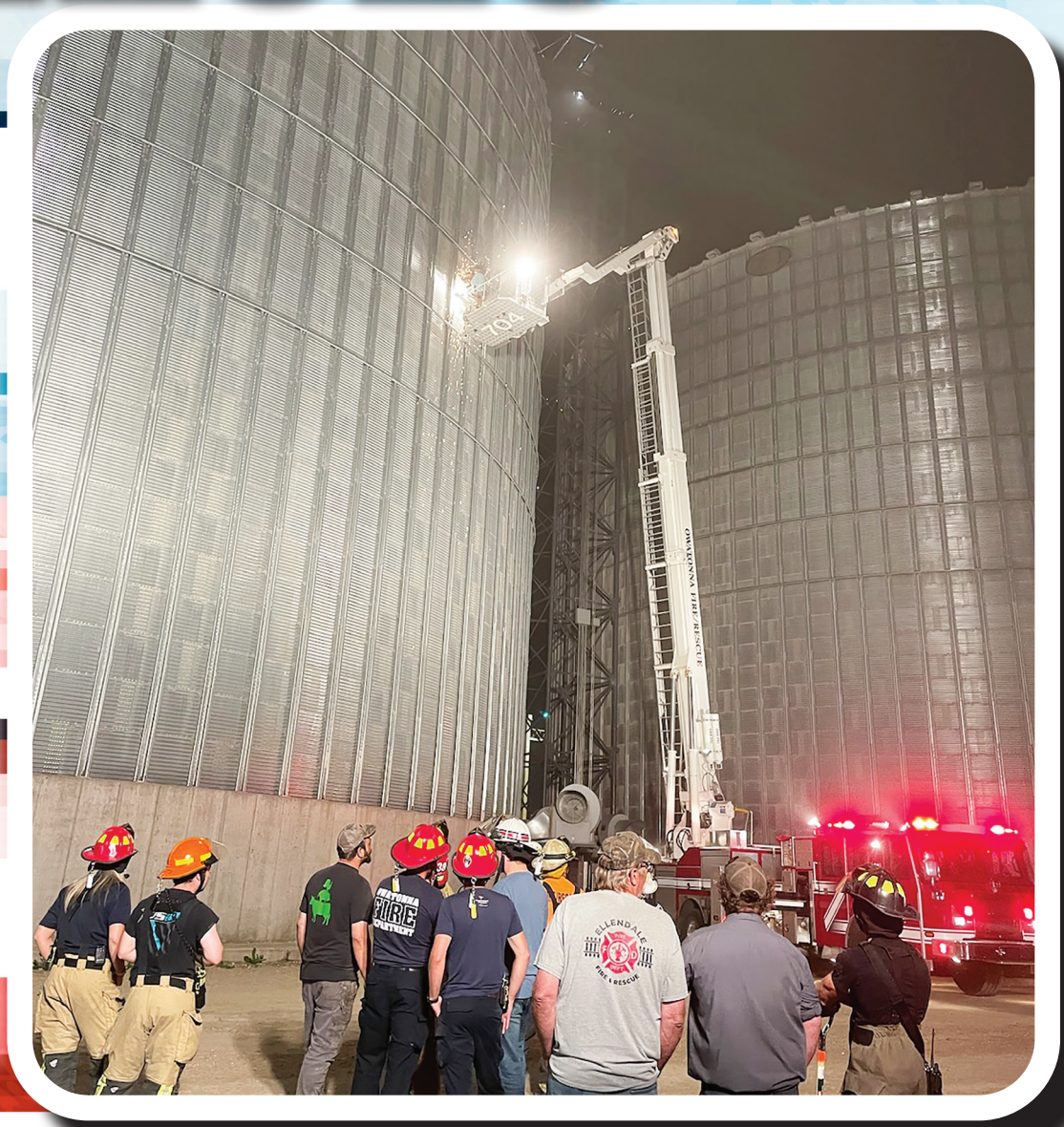


PUBLIC SAFETY HEROES

**Featuring deputies,
dispatchers, EMS,
firefighters and
officers serving
Steele County and
surrounding areas.**



Produced by Steele County Times • May 2023

'You see things nobody should see.'

Owatonna firefighter's career a lifelong dream

BY JONI HUBRED

Owatonna native Leila Kath started talking about being a firefighter when she was in first grade.

It's not surprising; she comes from a firefighting family. Still, she said, "my mom thought, oh, she'll grow out of it. And I never did."

"I enjoy being able to help people. It's unfortunately their worst day. Being that person they look to and to help just a little bit, it feels good."

Leila Kath

Owatonna Firefighter

Kath grew up watching her father and two uncles work for the Owatonna Fire Department. She also spent a lot of time at the fire

hall on Main Street and saw "the family aspect of being down at the station."

At Owatonna High School, Kath joined the Explorers, which offers students an opportunity to get a closer look at what a career in public safety entails. She stayed with the program all four years, and then it was on to Lake Superior College in Duluth and a degree in fire science technology and administration.

"Then I came right back here and got hired," she said.

Kath started as a resident firefighter, then paid on-call, and now works full time. While living at the fire hall, she became "super close with the other residents."

"We got matching fire tattoos; we were that close," she said.

At the time Kath was hired, she was one of just two female firefighters—and then the other woman

left to become a full-time police officer. There are now three female firefighters: Kath, Madelyn Seykora and Brooke Radel. Bonnie Hermel rounds out the group; she's the department administrative tech.

One of the things that may lead women to shy away from the fire department is the physical side of the job, Kath said, but it shouldn't. Firefighters go through training twice a month—pulling lines, cutting apart cars, water rescue, and recently, search and rescue in one of the buildings slated for demolition because of the Ascend riverfront project.

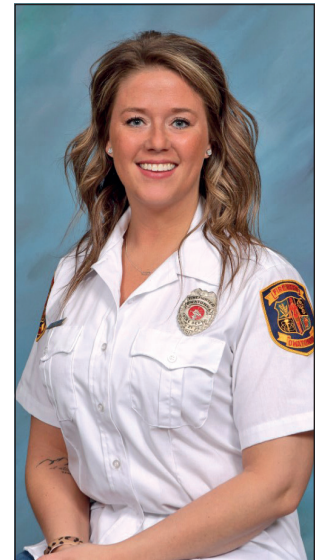
They're also encouraged to train on their own. Many use the gym on the fire hall's third floor, which is equipped with treadmills and other equipment provided by Cybex, Kath said.

Women can do the work, she said, "you just have to

believe in yourself."

"People still look at us as... they're women, can they do it? But we passed all the same tests. As long as I'm on the truck in front of or behind them, doing the job, there's no issue," she said.

Training has an added benefit, in the physical See **FIREFIGHTER** on 14 ►



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Leila Kath



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Leila Kath is pictured center with her dad, Marlin (left), and her uncle, Matt (right). Both men are retired Owatonna firefighters; Leila joined the department in 2014.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Owatonna firefighter Leila Kath relies on her dad, retired firefighter Marlin Kath, for support. She wanted to follow in his footsteps since she was in first grade.

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MAYO AMBULANCE- OWATONNA



Some members of Mayo Clinic Ambulance Service in Owatonna are, from left: Shawn Smith, Evan Schulz, Jeremy Berhow, Candy Darling, Damion Ramon, Steven Schneider and Rachel Schmidt. There are 23 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 Min-

nesota 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 responds to more than 3,500 calls each year throughout Steele County with the exception of Ellendale and Blooming Prairie, unless needed for mutual aid.

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 23, the ambulance service has three daytime crews and two nighttime crews, with two people on each crew. There are four rigs based in Owatonna.

PERSONNEL: **Supervisor:** Becky Griebel; **Assistant Supervisor/Paramedic:** Shawn Smith; **Paramedics:** Rick Ellingson, John MacKay, Candice Darling, Jeff Howard, Debra Beckstrom, Evan Schulz, Susan Ernste, Evelyn Hjelmgren, Rachel Schmidt and Travis Blake; **EMTs:** Dawn Winkels, Jeremy Berhow, Kayla Auger, Cassie Fedder, Steven Schneider, Damion Ramon, Lori Heslep, Caleb Schuder and Elizabeth Okerberg; **RN:** Nikkole Schwichtenberg.

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The Sturgis DWI King

BP's Peach tops officers in drunk driving arrests at rally

BY RICK BUSSLER

While thousands of motorcyclists zip across southern Minnesota into South Dakota for the Sturgis Bike Rally every August, Dan Peach of Blooming Prairie also makes the same trek, but it's not on a cycle or to party.

Instead, Peach shows up ready to work 12-hour shifts for 10 straight days as a sworn officer for the Sturgis Police Department. He takes vacation from his regular duties as a Blooming Prairie police officer to work the Sturgis rally.

And in a few short years of working the rally Peach has developed quite the reputation along with the unofficial title of "The Sturgis DWI King." Last year, Peach made 23 DWI arrests in just nine days, the most of any of the approximate 100 officers working the rally. In a single shift last year, he nabbed four drunk drivers in Sturgis and had

"I am a strong believer in preventing DWI crashes. We can prevent all of this. It's a 100% preventable crime. Don't drink and drive, it's that easy."

Dan Peach

Blooming Prairie Police Officer

three each on two other nights.

"I was definitely exhausted by the end of the night," Peach said of his four DWI arrests. "It's action packed out there. It's a different experience than what I'm used to in Blooming Prairie."

With only a year on as a police officer in 2016, Peach said he came across a Facebook post looking for police officers for the rally and thought it would be interesting. He has now worked seven years at the rally and plans to be back again this August.

"I wanted to get more experience as a cop and now I'm addicted," said Peach, who grew up in Owatonna. "It's amazing... quite the show from a law enforcement stand point."

He started out working

the rally on foot patrol by cruising the streets of Sturgis. One year he had 20 DWI arrests just by stumbling across the drunk cyclists on foot.

Because of Peach's proficiency in nabbing drunks, he was asked to be in a police cruiser with primary emphasis on DWI enforcement.

One of his most memorable experiences has been arresting the same drunk driver twice during the rally—two nights apart. "What are the odds of arresting the same person out of the thousands of people there?" Peach asked.

Another memorable experience was arresting a motorcyclist who provided a false name. Once Peach sorted out the man's identity, he discovered the man had a warrant for kidnapping.

During the rally, Peach is teamed up with Officer Clint Mitchell of the Sturgis Police Department. The two have worked together for most of the time Peach has been at Sturgis.

Also memorable is the excessive drinking that goes on in Sturgis. Peach

has arrested several cyclists with alcohol concentrations of .30 or higher, which is nearly four times the legal limit.

"Just think about all the ones we're not getting," Peach said.

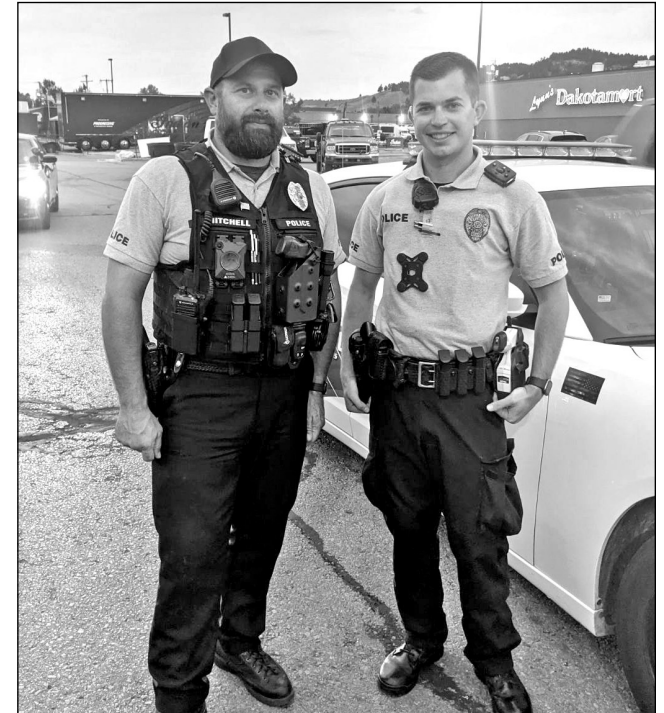
Drugs are also prevalent at Sturgis, according to Peach. He has found cocaine, methamphetamine and shrooms.

"I really respect the chief (in Sturgis). He always tells us to deal with the violation with a warning, citation or arrest and to just address it," Peach said.

This year Peach will bring a new tool with him to Sturgis. In January, he completed a week-long class to learn how to arrest drivers under the influence of controlled substances. Peach calls controlled substances the "new DWI wave." He said 75% of his arrests this year in Blooming Prairie have involved controlled substances.

For Peach, arresting drunk or impaired drivers brings him great satisfaction. "It just feels good taking them off the road," he says. "I am a strong believer in preventing DWI crashes. We can prevent all of this. It's a 100% preventable crime. Don't drink and drive, it's that easy."

With so many making the decision to get drunk and climb behind



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Blooming Prairie police officer Dan Peach, right, is shown with his partner, Clint Mitchell, at the Sturgis Bike Rally last August. Peach has traveled to South Dakota to work the rally for the past seven years. He plans to be back again this summer.

the wheel, Peach knows his work is important in "preventing others from getting injured or killed." In 2022, three fatalities happened during the Sturgis rally. There have been as many as 10 fatalities in some years.

Peach's passion for DWI enforcement doesn't only happen at Sturgis. He is also aggressive in arresting drunk drivers back in Blooming Prairie. In fact, last year he was honored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving with the Outstanding Service Award. He made 14 arrests in 2021. Last year his numbers were down, but he attributes that to his involvement as a training officer for the department of which he did for about

half of the year.

Peach attributes his success with DWI enforcement because of Sturgis. "It has helped me tremendously to be a better cop. Just from the DWIs, I can bring that knowledge back home to Blooming Prairie," he said.

While Peach is quite comfortable working in small town Blooming Prairie, he loves the idea of getting to be a "big city cop" for nine nights out of the year. "I love it, it's addicting," he said.

Peach aspires to become chief in Blooming Prairie after the current chief retires in a few years.

Asked what his goal is this year at Sturgis, Peach said: "As many as I can pick off the road."

2022 STURGIS BIKE RALLY BY THE NUMBERS

Total Bikers: 355,000
Highest Attendance: 750,000 in 2015
Total Police Officers: Approximately 100
DWI Arrests: 97 (Peach had 23)
Traffic Fatalities: 3 (Some years 10)
Felony Drug Arrests: 86
Total Crashes: 65



BLOOMING PRAIRIE FIRE



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.

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.

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 89 emergency calls in 2022, up slightly from the previous year. Those calls included:

- 23 fires, including structures, vehicles, grass, brush and crops
- 33 rescues, including extrication and medical assists

- 12 hazardous conditions, including gas spills, leaks, CO calls, chemical-related incidents
- 14 good intent calls – cancelled en route or were legal burns
- 7 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 Ingvalson, 2nd Assistant Justin Krell, Rescue Captain Bryce Schlichter, Assistant Fire Marshall

Matt Kittelson, Training Officer Lee Holtberg and Assistant Training Officer Andy Kasperek. Other officers: Mike Trom, president; David Wradislavsky, vice president and Matt Kittelson, secretary/treasurer.

SPECIAL NOTES: Chief Naatz reports that the department is “sitting good on members” with 28 firefighters.



BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE

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

PERSONNEL: Police chief, 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, Rick Ellingson and Travis Belich.

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 2022, the department handled 3,460 incidents in Blooming Prairie, up significantly from 2,479 the previous year. In comparison, there were 1,707 incidents in 2014. Here are the major calls for service that officers handled in 2022:

- 1,536 traffic stops
- 205 ordinance violations
- 45 suspicious activity incidents
- 35 welfare checks
- 34 domestics/fights
- 23 vehicle crashes
- 15 juvenile complaints
- 5 DWIs
- 5 criminal sexual conduct incidents
- 5 unwanted persons
- 3 drug activity incidents



Chief Greg Skillestad



Cpl. Jake Peterson



Officer Dan Peach



Officer Aaron Friesen



Officer Brad Busho

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.



Officer Joseph Martin



Officer Nathan Taarud



Officer Rick Ellingson



Officer Travis Belich

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BLOOMING PRAIRIE AMBULANCE

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 Halverson 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 332 emergency medical calls in 2022, an increase from 306 the previous



Members of Blooming Prairie Ambulance include (noted with their years of service), front from left: Laura Coughlin (2), Angie Laskewitz (2), Kathy Piller (14) and Jessica Kremer (17); back row: Nick Nelson (16), Jay Iverson (27), Tyler Wilson (2), Jeremy Halverson (13), Rick Hansen (27) and Dan Peach (8). Not pictured are Paula Abbe (14), Kaci Cavallaro (7), Karissa Fawver (5), Jake Peterson (21) and Isreal Wacek (6) and Miranda Camery (new). Wilson is the ambulance director.

year.

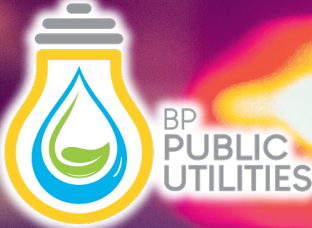
SPECIAL NOTES: They also provided training and outreach to the Blooming Prairie community, including CPR training to Pine Springs Pool

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. In addition to those ser-

vices, the crew members provide EMS education to third graders at Blooming Prairie Elementary School and local Scout groups. Blooming Prairie Ambulance has 16 active

members, but “we are always looking for new volunteers,” said Jessica Kremer. Applications for new EMTs are available at the Blooming Prairie City Center.



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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: Greg Bartsch is director of the Ellendale-Geneva Ambulance Service,

which was formed and is operated by a Joint Powers Board. There are two ambulance rigs with one based out of Ellendale and the other in Geneva. Ellendale Ambulance has been serving the area for 66 years.

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District 27

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



The volunteers for the Ellendale Fire Department paused for a photo recently after training for extrication, using rescue struts the department has acquired for stabilization during crashes. In the back row, from left, are Tyler McGowan, Chief Logan Busho, Pat Kruger, Nolan McGowan and Brian Flatland; front: Frank Altrichter, Josh Burgess, Derek Strohschein, Charles Spinler, Travis Ladwig and David Modder. Not pictured are Rick Johnson, Josh Otto, Jordan Rosacker, Allison Muillenberg, Jennelle Olson, Shawn Larson and Joel Adams.

CALLS: Ellendale Fire responded to 167 emergency calls in 2022, up slightly from 161 the previous year. The department assists Ellendale Ambulance with medical emergencies. 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 Travis Ladwig.

SPECIAL NOTES: Chief Logan Busho said the department has three openings. It's still working on the process of building a new firehall with assistance from the USDA.

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STAFF PHOTO BY JONI HUBRED

Members of the Medford Fire Department include Tim Amberg, John Anhorn, Trevor Davis, Chris Ditlevson, Dakota Ellingson, Rick Ellingson, Ben Finholdt, Eric Findholdt, Nick Goodnature, Darren Hagen, Brad Hager, Chief Rick Hager, Matthias Heinrichs, Craig Helgeson, Rich Kucera, JJ Lawson, Ben Maas, Kelly Markham, Matt Mullenbach, Bo Noble, Tavis Nowak, Mike Prondzinski, Mark Ristau, Greg Sanborn, Alex Schwartz, Dan Simon, and Mike Smith.

CALLS: Medford Fire responded to 175 calls in 2022: fire- 32, rescue- 13 and first responder- 130. Calls were up by 23 over the previous year, with most in the city (56) and Medford Senior Care (41).

OFFICERS: Chief Rick Hager, Assistant Chief Greg Sanborn and commanders John Anhorn, Craig Helgeson, Rich

Kucera and Mike Smith. Hager also serves as emergency management coordinator.

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.

The first fire hall was built in 1954.

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

COVERAGE AREA: The department provides fire service for 1,300 people in Medford as well as Medford Township and 18 sections of Deerfield Township.



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OWATONNA FIRE DEPARTMENT

STRUCTURE: Owatonna Fire is a combination of full-time firefighters; 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, Deerfield, 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 2022, the Owatonna Fire Department received a total of 3,406 calls for emergency assistance, up from 2,944 in 2021. They responded to 482 city incidents, 105 in rural areas, and provided mutual aid services in six incidents. Of those calls, 67 were for fires, 119 for rescue, and 77 were to clear hazardous conditions. The department also responded to 31 service calls, 113 "good intent" calls, and 179 fire alarms. Firefighters also provide inspection services and fire safety information, tours, and demos to hundreds of people each year.



PHOTO COURTESY SHOT IN THE DARK STUDIO

Members of the Owatonna Fire Department include: back row, from left: Justin Brown, Nic Thamert, Willie Grubish, Tore Osland, Anthony Kozelka, Mitch Terpstra, Ben Hanson, Austin Haverkost, Tyler Brase, Jacob Hines, Matt Halverson, Arik Brase, Charlie Seykora, Ryan Seykora and Ben Staska; front row: Chief Ed Hoffman, Bob Hager, Dan Hed, Tony Ringhofer, Jeff Boland, Miguel Chacon, Dacota Gaffke, Jason Karsten, Kevin Kreiner, Noah Tesch, Madelyn Seykora, Leila Kath, Brooke Radel, Brody Dalland and Bonnie Hermel.



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OWATONNA POLICE



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 Jeff Mundale, Captains Josh Sorensen and Andy Drenth

POLICE STAFF: Sergeants—Jason Petterson, Tracy DuChene, Jason Matejcek, Zack Schumacher, Benjamin Johnson, Valerie Satre and Matt Oeltjenbruns.

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

Patrol Officers—Joel Hunt, Brady Vaith, Andrew Van Osdale, Melissa Michael, Alan Callahan, Alexandra Vogel, Casey Martin with K-9 Vegas, Luke Selvik, Travis Johnson, Benjamin Metcalf, Joshua Lee, Zachary Plein, Jeremy Katz, Anthony Malepsy, Kyle Martin, Matthew Lounsbury, Madison Ziegler and Matthew Tomsche.

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, Dietrich Piepho, Tamora Klemmensen, Kimberlie Taylor, Alex Stenzel, Adrianna Swarthout and Don McCann.

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



Chief
Jeffrey Mundale



Captain
Andy Drenth



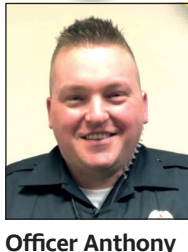
Captain
Josh Sorensen



Detective
Christian Berg



Officer Matthew
Lounsbury



Officer Anthony
Malepsy



Officer
Casey Martin



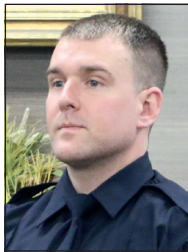
Officer
Benjamin Metcalf



Sgt. Tracy
DuChene



Sgt. Matt
Oeltjenbruns



Officer Matthew
Tomsche



Officer Madison
Ziegler



Officer Joel Hunt



Officer Joshua Lee



Sgt. Valerie Satre and Sgt. Ben Johnson.



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



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RICE STEELE 911 CENTER

The Rice Steele 911 Center is in its 23rd year of existence. Brian Becker has been the administrator of the center since February, replacing Jill Bondhus, who left in late 2022. 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 Brian Becker, GIS coordinator Justin Fuchs, office manager Nikki Hable and shift supervisors Matt Collins, Derrek Matson and John Wunderlich. The center currently does not have an operations manager.

TELECOMMUNICATORS: Amanda Rothbauer, Christina Conati, Katie Twaddle, Kelsy Wright, Kirk Oswald, Lisa DeRaad, Lynai Torabpour, Matt Collins, Nikki Hable, Norma Hoffmaster, Stacey LaPlount, Tim Siebsen, Sara Weed, Jennifer Garza, Caleb Matejcek 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, 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 2022, the 911 Center had a total of 196,654 emergency and non-emergency phone calls, an increase of almost 20,000 calls from the previous year. The center's busiest hour of the day is 6 p.m. with Friday being the busiest day of the week. May was the busiest call volume for the center with 21,109 calls.

The Owatonna Police Department produces the most calls for the center. The center handled 9,733 medical emergencies in 2022. Mayo Ambulance (based in Owatonna) had the most EMS calls followed by North Ambulance (based in Faribault). The busiest fire department was Faribault.



Brian Becker



Amanda Rothbauer



Christina Conati



Derrek Matson



John Wunderlich



Justin Fuchs



Katie Twaddle



Kelsy Wright



Kirk Oswald



Lisa DeRaad



Lynai Torabpour



Matt Collins



Nikki Hable



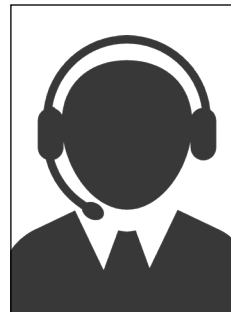
Norma Hoffmaster



Stacey LaPlount



Tim Siebsen



Sara Weed



Jennifer Garza



Caleb Matejcek



Kelsey Cook



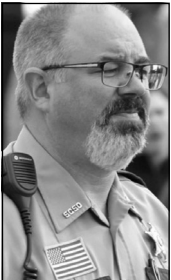
STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF



Sheriff Lon Thiele



Chief Deputy Scott Hanson



Sgt. Bill Youngquist



Members of the Steele County Special Deputies include, front from left: Dennie Himle, Mary Delzer, Dietrich Piepho, Paul Hanson, Lewis Luedtke and Grant Duffy; back: Mike Meyer, Adam Miller, Gene Linse, Wyonne Priebe, coordinator and Jeff Kirchner.



Sgt. Chad Forystek



Sgt. Andy Seifert



Deputy Darrin Helget



Other special deputies include, from left: Scott Prestegard, Mike Urch, Gene Fisher and Jeff Stendel.



Deputy Caleb Buck



Investigator Matt Borash



Sgt. Mike Smith



Investigator Kari Woltman



Deputy Tony David



Deputy Sean Robbins

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.

2022 INCIDENTS: The sheriff's office handled 17,907 incidents throughout 2022, down about 2,000 from the previous year. Of those, 2,671 were traffic stops, 92 child abuse/protection reports, 51 thefts, 41 DWI arrests, 21 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 fourth 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, 2018 and 2022. His current term expires in 2025.

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 (investigator), Tyler Brase, Caleb Buck, Tony David, Mike Diercks, Ben Frear, Jeffrey Gunther, Darrin Helget, Jim Holton, Josh Horejsi, Jake Miller, Sean Robbins, Chad Schlueter, Jayson Teichroew and Kari Woltman (investigator).

COURT BAILIFFS: Jim Holton, Jake Miller and Jayson Teichroew

JURY ATTENDANTS: Sharon Kubicek, Kay Oberle and Jeff Ratzloff.

RECORDS: Renee Babcock, Jane Christenson,

Adriana Gonzales, Karen Meier, Rebecca Melchert and Kate Schroeder.

DETENTION CENTER: Anthony Buttera, administrator; Paul Prissel, assistant administrator; Greg Huebbe, Kevin Kozel, Jed Loftus and Joyce Prusha, sergeants; Linda Skala and Jesse Steneman, corporals; John Anderson, Travis Avelar, Katelin Bahl, Michelle Bromley, Garrett Byrnes, Taylor Derry, Steven Gjerald, Sean Grivette, Jessica Guggisberg, Matthew Gwin, Paris Ingerbritson, Joel Jandt, Rachel Kuriger, Adil Lebgue, Ikran Mohamed, Katie Monson, Steve Schulz and Michael

See **SHERIFF** on 14 ►



United Way
of Steele County

Thank you!!

Public Safety Sector

"Coming together is the beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success."

-Henry Ford



Owatonna firefighter's career a lifelong dream

◀ **FIREFIGHTER** from 2 activity is a great way to "release energy" and boost mental health, Kath said. She also feels comfortable talking with her colleagues—and her number one go-to, her dad.

Both her father and uncle passed on an important lesson, that the way to cope with the stress and the terrible things they see on the job is to talk about it.

"The key is not keeping it bottled in," she said. "You see a lot of things ordinary people don't see. Things nobody should see."

Despite being among the first on the scene for the most terrible tragedies in people's lives, Kath can't see herself doing anything else.

"I enjoy being able to help people," she said. "It's unfortunately their worst day. Being that person they look to, and to help just a

little bit, it feels good."

Kath said she also enjoys working in the same town where she grew up. It's still the same Owatonna of her childhood in many ways, "it's still that safe community that I thought, if I'm lucky enough to have a family, this is where I want to raise my kids."

The town has changed, too.

"I love the progress of Owatonna moving forward and the expansion of everything," she said, noting especially the redevelopment downtown.

The fire department is changing, too. When Kath was first hired, her dad's generation of firefighters were all looking toward retirement. Now, there are only five people in the department with 10 or more years of service under their belts.

"There's been a ton

of change," Kath said.

"When I was a girl, I had this vision... I'm gonna work with my dad and the guys at the fire department. Some of the things I tell him now, he goes, 'Leila, that happened with us. It's just different people.'"

She also encourages anyone interested in becoming a firefighter to "come down and do a ride along, see what it's like." To get a taste of the physical requirements, you can also look up firefighter fitness videos online.

Part of the challenge in recruiting is the commitment. Training can be tiring and takes three months—with a lot of time spent away from home. One of the benefits, though, lies in the support of what Kath calls the brotherhood of firefighters.

"It's your second family," she said.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF

◀ **SHERIFF** from 13 Witter, correctional officers; Cindy Fowler, program coordinator; Dawn Grunklee, programs assistant; Leah Kent, nurse and Nancy Gjerald and Lisa Risch, support staff.

SPECIAL DEPUTIES: Coordinator Wyonne Pribe, Sgt. Lewis Luedtke,

Sgt. Adam Miller, Mary Delzer, Grant Duffy, Gene Fisher, Paul Hanson, Denie Himle, Jeff Kirchner, Eugene Linse, Mike Meyer, Dietrich Piepho, Scott Prestegard, Jeff Stendel and Mike Urch.

MOUNTED POSSE: Capt. Tony Schwering, 1st Lt. Jill Malecha, 2nd

Lt. Anna Schultz, Sgt. of Arms John Gerold, Joe Schwering, past captain, Michelle Darrah, Mary Delzer, Tom Hager, Mike Haubenschild, Monica Heine, Skyla Jakel, Kay Klemmer, Wendy Knudtson, Bob Malecha, Duane Peltz, Mary Purfeerst, Becky Schwering, Marilyn Schwering and Tanner Wesley.



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John Petersburg

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THANK YOU PUBLIC SAFETY HEROES!



We want to extend a special thank you to the Blooming Prairie area public safety agencies for their diligent efforts in keeping our community safe. Police, fire and EMS recently assisted us with a safety drill at our Blooming Prairie facility. Their expertise helps us ensure a safe work environment for our employees. We value our partnership in keeping us all safe.



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



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STEELE COUNTY FREE FAIR

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!



**"SEE YOU
AT THE
FAIR!"**

