



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Sheboygan County News

A Newsletter for County Employees

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Family Court
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Sheboygan County Reduces Property Taxes Three Consecutive Years

by: Adam Payne, County Administrator

Due primarily to operating expense increases, loss of interest revenue, and unfunded state mandates, we began our budget process with over a \$5 million funding gap. However, thanks to good decisions in the past, consolidating and streamlining, establishing priorities, a healthy undesignated fund, and excellent collaboration, we were able to provide a third consecutive year of property tax relief.

The \$144 million 2010 County Budget supports nearly 1,000 employees, hundreds of contracted service providers and more than 200 programs and services. Our programs include maintaining the safety of our highways and roads, law enforcement, protecting our natural resources, providing birth certificates and marriage licenses, land records, and critical health and human services

for the mentally ill, elderly, physically disabled, children, and the financially poor. We also own and operate a thriving airport and provide the facilities for the UW-Sheboygan Campus, both vital to economic development. We have healthy fiscal reserves, an excellent bond rating, and are effectively meeting the demands of providing high quality services in a fiscally responsible manner.

The budget reflects a tremendous team effort among County Board Supervisors, Department Heads and many others to build on our organization's past accomplishments and to improve how we meet the needs of Sheboygan County residents. The County has prepared fiscal outlook plans, conducted department operational reviews, completed a county-wide program evaluation and prioritization process

for the second time, proactively sought community input, and made timely decisions that helped position us for success.

As you know, change is inevitable, and all of us need to be part of the solution. We must continuously strive to gain efficiencies, establish priorities, collaborate, and share services with other units of government. Like any successful business, we also need to diversify our revenue streams and be less beholden to the State. I want us to continue to lead by example, provide quality services, and not pass the buck to future generations.

Thank you for all that you do, and being an important part of our team. If we continue to work together, and have the courage to lead and embrace change, our future looks bright.

New Tenants in Administration Building

by: Adam Payne, County Administrator

I'm very pleased to share that staff of the newly formed Sheboygan County Economic Development Corporation (SCEDC) will be starting next month and utilizing vacant space on the second floor of the Administration Building. Economic development is one of the most important issues facing Sheboygan County, for over 5,284

residents are out of work, with unemployment hovering around 8.1 percent.

Fortunately, representatives of the private and public sector recognized that we must do better, and formed the SCEDC to provide a proactive and coordinated effort to improve job growth and the economic well-being of

businesses, communities, and residents of Sheboygan County.

Sheboygan County has a lot going for it. If we pull together, our community will be able to compete with anyone. Look for more information in the next newsletter.

Energy Usage Drops

by: Jim TeBeest, Building Services Director

You've made a difference in the County's overall consumption of gas and electricity. Through the first 3 quarters of 2009, Sheboygan County's Energy Conservation Team is pleased to report a 7% reduction in

gas usage and a 9.5% reduction in electrical usage, a savings of \$39,000.

Just by doing little things like turning off your computer at night saves \$40 per year per computer and can add up

to a \$20,000 per year savings! Keep up the good work Sheboygan County!

Schaubel Makes People Comfortable with Legal System

by: Susan Schaubel, Assistant Court Commissioner



The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.

Anna Quindlen
Writer



When I was leaving my previous job with Milwaukee County, a judge that I worked with gave me one of the best pieces of advice that I ever received. He said, "Remember, most people have very little contact with the court system during their lives. A small claims case or a traffic ticket may be the only time that they are ever involved in litigation. Make sure that you leave them with a good impression of what the courts do."

I hope that I've lived up to that goal. Since arriving in Sheboygan in 1996, I've tried to make people comfortable with the legal system and their role in the process. I've met with thousands of Sheboygan Residents over the years and I hope that they've left the courthouse with a positive view of their experience here.

As Assistant Court Commissioner, I can look forward to everyday knowing that different challenges will be waiting for me. One of my primary roles in the court system is to preside over the small claims court. In 2008, there were more than 4200 small claims cases filed in Sheboygan County. Many of the cases filed in small claims court involve disputes over debts or evictions. However, I see many other types of actions as well, including personal injury cases, property disputes, construction claims and contract disputes. After a person makes an appearance at a small claims initial appearance date, I'll meet with both parties for a mediation session where we'll try to resolve the dispute without a formal hearing.

Many times, after they've had a chance to express their opinions and listen to each other in a neutral environment, the litigants can reach a resolution that satisfies both sides. If the parties can't reach a resolution at the pre-trial date, I'll preside over a trial to resolve the dispute.

Over time, the work of the Family Court Commissioner's Office has grown and I'm providing more assistance with the case load every year. When needed, I preside over initial appearances in misdemeanor and felony criminal cases where I set bail and bond conditions for defendants. On other days, I may need to hear ordinance returns where I take pleas and set fines. I have assisted with mental commitment hearings, paternity matters, juvenile and CHIPs cases, stipulated divorces, and injunction hearings. I regularly review and approve search warrants for various law enforcement agencies and issue temporary restraining orders in domestic violence and harassment proceedings.

I've also been privileged to preside over the weddings of hundreds of Sheboygan County residents. I've been stopped many times while I'm out and about in Sheboygan by couples that I've married. I enjoy hearing their "happily ever after" stories and looking at all the baby pictures that the couples love to show off!

In addition to my duties with the Family Court Commissioner's office, I assist the judges here in Sheboygan with research and advisory memoranda on cases pending before the circuit court. I'm also an editorial board member for "Wisconsin Lawyer" magazine.

I've been very fortunate in my life away from the office. While I was in college, I had the opportunity to study and live in London, New York and Los Angeles. I spent a summer working at the United Nations headquarters in New York and time working for PricewaterhouseCoopers and BBC Television Sports in London. I've had the opportunity to travel all over the United States, Canada and Europe.

The best part of my life, however, is the most recent. I married my wonderful husband in 2007 and this year, we welcomed our beautiful daughter into our family. I enjoy trying new recipes and coming up with new, healthy "big girl" foods that we all can enjoy. When the weather cooperates, we love to go out for family walks or jogs. During quiet time, I love mysteries whether they're in books, movies or television shows. Unfortunately, I'm also an expert on chocolate in almost every form.

Thank you to all the wonderful employees of Sheboygan County. You make it a pleasure to work here!



TELEPHONE NUMBERS FOR WINTER ROAD CONDITIONS

by: Greg Schnell, Highway Commissioner

Winter has arrived and it's always helpful to be reminded of important numbers to call to check on road conditions. To report a slippery intersection or dangerous area that needs attention within the county, call the Sheriff's Department at 459-

3111 and they will notify the Highway Department of the concern via phone or radio.

If you need to travel when road conditions are not the best, for local road conditions, call 459-4304. For State-wide road conditions, call 511 or 1-866-511-

9472, or you can check online at www.511wi.gov. Please drive safely this winter.



Section 125 Claims Are Due Soon

by: Ruth Wilsing, Benefits Assistant

The Section 125 Health Care Reimbursement Account offers a real advantage for your pocketbook. Many people find this a cost effective way to pay for such items as medical and dental plan deductibles/co-payments, eye-glasses, contact lenses, orthodontics and other health-related expenses that may not be covered by insur-

ance. Even taxpayers who do not itemize can take advantage of this tax break.

Services provided in 2009 can be claimed under your 2009 Section 125 Plan until February 12, 2010. Reimbursements are based on the date the service is provided, not the date you receive your explanation of benefits from the insurance carrier or the provider billing

statement. Reimbursement forms are available in the Human Resources Department or on the shared director. Once the form is completed, print it and send it to the Human Resources Department for reimbursement. For more information contact Ruth Wilsing at 920-459-3578.

**Friendly
Reminder**

Employee Generosity Keeps Increasing

by: Adam Payne, County Administrator

Sheboygan County Employees and County Board Supervisors generously donated \$26,960 to the Sheboygan and Plymouth Area United Way during the 2009 campaign, an increase of \$939 or 3.6% over last year! We had a slight decrease in the number of employees participating this year, but those that participated gave more. My sincere thanks to everyone who participated. Since 2004 when we collected \$13,907, we have had an increase in donations every year.

Our United Way Campaign Building Challenge was won by the Law Enforcement

Center, which also included the Detention Center. The Sheriff's Department had an increase in both number of participants and contributors—Well done! Our internal United Way Campaign Ad Hoc Committee treated the Sheriff's Department staff with a brat fry on December 4th.

In addition, many great prizes were generously donated by Ad Hoc Committee Members for the random drawing. Winners were: Lesa Barnard (two tickets for the December

7th Packers/Ravens game in Green Bay), Leah Rozite (\$50 Stefano Restaurants Gift Certificate), Cindy Eckhardt (\$50 Texas Roadhouse Gift Card), Cheryl Jackett (\$25 Gas Card), Tom Benning (\$25 Chamber Cash), Jill Schema (\$25 Menards Gift Card), Sue Wessel (\$25 Fleet Farm Gift Card), Debbie Mayer (\$25 Fleet Farm Gift Card), Nan Todd (\$25 Fleet Farm Gift Card), and Nancy Stanskas (\$25 Fleet Farm Gift Card). Thank you again for your generosity.



Health Plan Changes Take Effect

by: Michael Collard, Human Resources Director

Three types of changes have been made to the health plan for 2010.

The first is that our preferred provider option network has been changed from IHG back to HealthEOS Plus. This is the same network we had in place from about November 2007 through November 2008. This change will not affect many of you, since the majority of the providers we use are in both networks, but it is important to check to make sure that your providers are in our current network.



Secondly, we have made a number of changes to the plan language to comply with changes in state law. These changes put coverage for mental health services on parity with other medical coverage; adopt mandated benefits for autism and cochlear implants; and allow dependents to remain on the plan up to age 27.

Finally, for non-union employees and members of some unions, we have a new separate prescription drug benefit, which has its own schedule of co-pays and is not subject to the

deductibles and co-pays in the regular medical benefit.

All of these changes make it important for you to show your new health card to each one of your health care providers the next time you visit. For further information, see the materials which were distributed with your cards, or contact the Human Resources Department at (920) 459-3105.

Health Fair Planned

by: Ruth Wilsing, Benefits Analyst

Sheboygan County will be partnering with the City of Sheboygan and the Sheboygan Area School District for the second annual health fair to be held on Saturday, January 16, 2010 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Blue Harbor Resort & Conference Center.

The events will provide a variety of

educational opportunities, hands on learning and participatory sessions. Be sure to wear your comfortable clothes and gym shoes.

Blue Harbor will be providing free water park passes for the first 50 children who attend the fair, and dis-



counted water park passes for the remaining children.

There will be raffle drawings throughout the day. Plan to attend and bring your family for a fun filled day.

Employees Increase Financial Savvy

by: Penny Buchanan-Elser, Human Resources Analyst

Sheboygan County recently offered employees the opportunity to attend a series of classes designed to help them become financially savvy consumers—"Making Your Money Work for You". Margaret Wittkopp and Jeremy Burri of Veritas Financial Services, LLC and The Heart-

land Institute presented the classes. Employees who attended offered the following comments:

- All the information was valuable. Classes were very worthwhile.
- These were wonderful and presented in such a positive manner.
- It is never too late!

- The class was fascinating!

- I learned a whole lot!

Classes will be repeated in late February and early March 2010. Watch your email or postings in your building for future class offerings and dates!



Our 3rd Annual All Employee Appreciation Picnic will be held at the Airport on Thursday, August 19. Please mark your calendars!

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Office of the Family Court Commissioner A Small Department with Big Responsibilities

by: Rebecca Persiek, Court Commissioner

The primary responsibility of the Court Commissioner's Office is to assist in the administration of the court system. That is a big responsibility for a department with only three staff members. I am the Court Commissioner, Susan Schaubel is the Assistant Court Commissioner, and Cindy Eckhardt is our Paralegal Aide. Together, we work to ensure the public has timely and meaningful access to the courts.

By state statute, a court commissioner must be an attorney with at least three years of legal experience. A law degree is necessary because commissioners are appointed by the Circuit Court Judges to assume some of their duties. These include conducting temporary order hearings in divorces; probable cause hearings in mental commitments; and bail hearings and/or initial appearances in criminal, traffic, small claims, ordinance, paternity and juvenile court cases. This office also helps the circuit courts by rendering final decisions in stipulated divorces, domestic abuse and harassment injunction hearings and most small claims cases. In addition, Susan and I are also on-call 24 hours a day to authorize search warrants in criminal investigations.

Our office is always busy. Many hearings are required to be held within certain time limits. Many others involve families in crisis who need to get into court as soon as possible to address urgent custody or placement concerns. That, in turn, can make scheduling challenging. In 2008, for example, we conducted 155 injunction hearings, 313 paternity pre-trial conferences or initial appearances, 138 Chapter 51 (mental commitment) probable cause hearings, 229 temporary hearings in divorce cases, 146 stipulated divorce hearings, and 134 small claims trials.

In addition to those hearings, we also hold initial appearances or bail hearings in multiple criminal cases each day. Twice a week we conduct initial appearances in ordinance cases. Susan and I also perform about 150 weddings a year. Interestingly, last year was the first year since I became a commissioner in 2003 that I performed more weddings than divorces.

Susan and I are both authorized to preside over all the hearings assigned to us. In general, however, we divide the responsibilities between us. Susan usually presides over all small claims cases. She also serves the courts by researching complex legal issues and advising the judges regarding how the law should be applied in particular situations. I usually preside over all other types of hearings.

Of the hearings I conduct, temporary orders in divorce cases are the most challenging. Wisconsin law requires a waiting period of 120 days from the time a couple files for divorce until the divorce may be granted. Often, custody and placement issues, or issues regarding use of property, arise during the waiting period. If so, I conduct a hearing and issue a temporary order governing those issues until the final divorce hearing. The hearings are challenging because they often occur very early in the divorce process when emotions are running high. Moreover, I am always cognizant that the custody and placement orders I make have the potential to have a huge impact on a child's life. That is something I don't take lightly.

In addition to conducting hearings, the Court Commissioner's Office also assists the courts through mediation. Small claims disputes and child custody disputes are mediated through this office before they go to trial. If litigants are able to resolve matters through mediation, the time and expense of a trial will be avoided by not just the litigants, but also the courts.

Mediation in small claims and family cases are handled differently. Small claims mediation occurs in-house. Last year, Susan conducted pre-trial mediation conferences in 656 small claims cases. Family court mediation, however, is conducted by independent contractors I have hired to provide that service.

Featured Department continued

Wisconsin law requires all family court mediators to have at least 25 hours of mediation training, or at least 3 years of professional experience in dispute resolution. Every mediator is also required to have training on the dynamics of domestic violence and the effects of domestic violence on victims of domestic violence and on children. Sheboygan County is fortunate to have four mediators whose qualifications greatly exceed the standards required by law. They are Patty Brinkman, Wendy Yurk and Sue Hein of Northshore Clinic, as well as Francine Arnold of Arnold Mediation Services, LLC. In 2008, our mediators worked with 257 families to help resolve custody and placement disputes.

Although mediation is conducted by independent contractors, Paralegal Aide Cindy Eckhardt coordinates all other aspects of mediation. She is responsible for referring each case to a specific mediator, notifying the Court of the outcome of mediation, as well as tracking mediation billing.

Prior to attending mediation, couples are required to attend an educational class entitled "Remember the Children." The class focuses on issues important to families including the effects of divorce on children, children's developmental stages, appropriate placement arrangements given a child's development, as well as effective ways for parents to communicate with one another and co-parent despite their separation. Cindy is also responsible for registering each participant for the class, providing proof of completion to the circuit court, and collecting and receipting the registration fee.

In addition to performing the daily tasks required to keep the office running smoothly, Cindy serves as our receptionist. This means she answers the endless phone calls we receive each week, as well as responds to customers who walk into the office with questions. She also schedules most court appearances. These tasks require her to have a working knowledge of family, criminal and civil law. It also requires extreme patience and a high degree of professionalism. Luckily for us, Cindy possesses both.

Susan, Cindy and I have worked together for the past 6 years. We have developed a strong, supportive professional relationship with one another. Although our workload is heavy and the cases we encounter can be stressful, we work as a team to ensure all cases assigned to us are handled promptly and professionally.