



COUNTY  
Knudson named  
2024 State Sheriff  
of the Year

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2025



SPORTS  
Max Ramberg  
National  
Champion

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# YEAR IN REVIEW

SPECIAL PULL-OUT SECTION PUBLISHED BY THE BALDWIN BULLETIN • DECEMBER 31, 2025

HAMMOND

## SCC makes headlines for different reasons

**“You will be missed beyond words”:** Mindy Ramberg, 39, a St. Croix Central teacher, died September 16 from an allergic reaction to a bee sting. Ramberg was starting her 16th year, beloved by many. “She’s irreplaceable,” said fellow teacher Luke Fritsche, who coached with Ramberg. “Mindy made everyone want to be a better teacher and person...Truly the

most positive, uplifting, and fun person many of us will ever meet.”  
**Harassment Restraining Orders:** St. Croix Central Superintendent Tim Widiker was served two harassment restraining orders by former Human Resources Director Makayla Murtha and Heather Jourdeans, a former teacher. “In the process of doing everything he could to get rid of me,

for no reason based on the truth, he has dragged my good name and reputation through the mud without any due process,” Murtha wrote in her resignation letter. The case went through multiple court hearings before Court Commissioner Tim Heckman dismissed the charge. Jourdeans

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CONTRIBUTED

The Ramberg family

EDUCATION



DELILAH GREENE | NIEBELING'S PHOTOGRAPHY

The Marching Arts performing their routine one last time in front of their home fans Oct. 20.

## Greenfield raises over \$100K for Heart Association

**The dynasty continues:** The Baldwin-Woodville Marching Arts captured their third straight State Marching Band Class A Championship and their 10th since 2007. “It’s a national panel of judges who have never watched any of our shows before,” director Adam Bassak said, discussing the experiences at the state. “Somebody might be

looking at something completely different than anybody else has all year. “When we won three of the four caption awards, and especially the music and visual ones, we were pretty sure at that point (of finishing first).”

**Class of 2025:** Wes Chapin was named B-W’s Class of 2025 Valedictorian, while Drew Stark was

selected as Salutatorian. Chapin plans to study nuclear engineering at MIT, while Stark will study Computer Science at Carleton College in Minneapolis. SCC didn’t name Valedictorian or Salutatorian and instead announced 24 graduated

SEE EDUCATION, PAGE 4: YEAR IN REVIEW

CRIME AND COURTS

## Lindus employee charged with theft greater than \$10,000

**Smestad new Circuit Court Judge (pictured):** Brian Smestad is the newest St. Croix County Circuit Court Judge, as he defeated Heath Amos by 2,800 votes. Smestad was the previous Deputy District Attorney before being elected. He was previously an attorney for the State Public Defender’s Office in Hudson and opened his practice in Baldwin in 2003.



Brian Smestad

**Driver on July 4, head-on, was intoxicated:** A St. Croix County Sheriff’s report confirmed Cody W. Klasse, 18, Emerald, was going as fast as 90 miles per hour and had a blood alcohol level of .207 when he crossed into the lane and struck Maxwell L. Krueger, 24, Baldwin. Both drivers were pronounced dead at the scene.

**Woodville man charged with 17 sex crimes:** Wyatt Mentink faces 10 counts of child pornography possession, four counts of exposing genitals, two counts of child

SEE CRIME AND COURTS, PAGE 4: YEAR IN REVIEW



# Happy New Year

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Pictured from left to right: Courtney Smith, Dan Schulze, Tony Patraw, Joe Meyer, Sam McGrane and John Kusz. Those six along with John Kruk and Joey Moor were honored for their lifesaving efforts when responding to a call for a person who was unresponsive and experiencing a seizure.

BALDWIN

# Gov. Evers visits Baldwin to praise Family Resource Center

**Kosch named Advanced EMT of the Year:** Steve Kosch had a surprising reaction after being named the 2024 State Advanced Emergency Medical Technician of the Year. “For one of my coworkers to take the time and write something about me, submit it, and then have the board evaluate it, that was more of an honor than anything else,” Kosch, who works for Baldwin Area EMS, said. “To have one of my coworkers think I was special enough to take the time and make that effort.”

**Gov. Evers visits Family Resource Center:** Gov. Tony Evers made a stop at the Family Resource Center in Baldwin.

“The longevity of this program is amazing,” he said. Twenty-seven years and taking care of, working with parents and babies, and making sure they get off to a good start. They’ve done it well. They’ve continued to do it well. It’s extraordinary.”

**Baldwin EMS to offer anonymous infant Safe Haven option:** The Baldwin Area EMS building will soon house the only Safe Haven Baby Box in western Wisconsin. Under the Safe Haven Law, a parent can leave an unharmed newborn anonymously, without fear of prosecution, to a law enforcement officer, EMS

provider, or hospital staff member.

**Chamber Award Winners:** Pillar Bank was named the Baldwin-Woodville Chamber of Commerce Large Business of the Year, while Trinity Designs took home Small Business of the Year...Everlasting Beauty won People’s Choice at the Chamber’s Chili Fest, while St. Croix Electric took home Judge’s Choice.

**Keeping Baldwin residents safe:** Baldwin Police, United Fire, and Baldwin Area EMS were dispatched July 27 to a call about a person who was unresponsive and experiencing a seizure. Members from the three crews responded to

the scene and restored the person’s pulse and breathing. EMS transferred the person to Western Wisconsin Health, and the individual recovered. Those honored at a Village Board meeting were Courtney Smith and Tony Patraw (paramedics), Dan Schulze, Joe Meyer, and Joey Moor (EMTs), John Kruk (EMS Paramedic), Sam McGrane (Police), and John Kusz (Firefighter).

**Others:** Village Hall experienced significant turnover in 2025, including a New Library Director, Treasurer, Public Works Director, and Administrative Assistant...Doug Newton, who has been on the Village Board for 28 years,

chose not to seek reelection. Ashley Chevrier was elected to replace him...Baldwin native Ole Monicken raised the U.S. flag during a Minnesota Twins game. Monicken was honored for his service during the Vietnam War, as he received a Purple Heart... Paul Seeling announced the 96-year-old Woodville Leader and 133-year-old Sun-Argus will close at the end of the year. Seeling has been the publisher of both papers for the last 21 years....Baldwin Area EMS Paramedic Courtney Smith was recognized as the First Responder of the Year by Representative Rob Kreibich and Senator Rob Stafsholt.

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COUNTY

# Over 4,000 housing units needed by 2050

**Solar farm in the works:** There have been multiple stories in the Bulletin this year about Xcel Energy’s proposed solar farm in St. Croix County. One of the latest came toward the end of October, when they announced plans to cut the project’s scope by 40 percent, limit it to a single phase, build a new transmission line, and include battery backup facilities. In November, the County Board of Supervisors approved spending up to \$350,000 after hiring a Milwaukee law firm to continue efforts to ensure the project is completed in the best interests of county residents.

**Knudson named 2024 State Sheriff of the Year:** St. Croix County Sheriff Scott Knudson was awarded the 2024 Wisconsin Badger State Sheriff of the Year by the Wisconsin Badger State Sheriff’s Association. Knudson was nominated by Pepin County Sheriff Joel Wener, who wrote: “Sheriff Knudson has demonstrated exceptional leadership, dedication, and innovation throughout his tenure, making profound contributions to law enforcement and the community at large.”

**2027 is a big year planned for the County:** St. Croix County Supervisors approved a plan to launch the first phase of a \$70 million package to expand the county jail and upgrade emergency communications infrastructure, with significant work starting in 2027 and completion target-



SAM NIEBELING | NIEBELING’S PHOTOGRAPHY

This float during the Hammond Heartland Days parade in August represents the thoughts of many residents in St. Croix County.

ed for 2030. The first phase, scheduled for 2027, will add special-needs cells and a new pod to accommodate projected growth in the inmate population.

**New housing units are needed:** A study commissioned by the St. Croix County Economic Development Cooperation showed the County will require between 4,300-4,600 housing units by 2050 to accommodate projected growth and changing household demographics. Other key facets of the study included seniors lacking the option to downsize and younger households facing affordability hurdles.

**‘One Big Beautiful Bill’ will affect the county:** When the One Big Beautiful Bill takes full effect in 2027, St. Croix County will be required to increase staffing and workload to bring the county into compliance with mandated changes, while receiving fewer federal funds to cover service costs. That was the message, Health and Human Services Director Bob Rohret told his committee during a September meeting.



JASON SCHULTE | BALDWIN BULLETIN

Melanie Kofal (left) sold St. Croix Valley Dance Academy to Melanie Kellar (right).

BUSINESS

## New owners at Ras’ on Main, Lupient Ford

**Prices excited to launch Ras’ on Main 2.0:** Cassie and Kyle Price became the new owners of Ras’ on Main in Hammond, taking over for longtime owner Glen Rasmussen after 29 years. “It really resonated with me,” Cassie said. “I didn’t want somebody else to own Ras’ that we wanted to keep it in the community.”

**Li-Su Thai owners:** Baldwin has been very welcoming: Li-Su Thai Kitchen opened up on 10th Avenue in Baldwin, where the former China Taste was located. “The Baldwin community has been very welcoming,” said manager Mei La. Owner La Wu believes the building had potential upon first seeing it.

**Getting the customer back to number one:** Lupient Ford became the new owner of Flagship Ford in Baldwin. The Lupient Auto Group has been selling cars since 1969 and never had a Ford dealership until now. “We need to get back to, first and foremost, the customer is now one,” said Jason Jasinski, General Manager.

**Lifelong dream now reality for Weyer as Northside Café opens:** Brian and Melisa Weyer opened The Northside Café at 1049 Curtis Street in Baldwin. “Food makes people happy,” she said. “I love to make people happy. It brings people together. I see people enjoying each other and enjoying food.”

**Kellar new owner of St. Croix Valley Dance Academy (photo):** Melanie Kellar is the new owner of the St. Croix Valley Dance Academy after purchasing the business from Melanie Kofal, who owned the company for 21 years. “I didn’t want to see it go to just anyone,” Kofal said. Kellar was the Academy’s full-time studio manager before becoming the owner.

**Others:** New owners of St. Croix Garage, B-Dub Nutrition Hub... Johnson Tractor moved to a new building south of I-94, while Bill’s Dairy Supply moved from Spring Valley to the old Johnson building... Baldwin-Woodville Insurance Services changed its name to M2 Insurance... Everlasting Ink Tattoo Studio opened up next door to Everlasting Beauty in Baldwin...

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SPORTS

# State success for B-W, SCC athletes

**B-W Football advances to state semifinals:** The Baldwin-Woodville football team finished the 2025 season 12-1 with the only loss to Winneconne in the Division 4 State Semifinals. It was the third year in a row the Blackhawks had reached the game. “It’s been a great year,” coach Dan Keefer said. “I’m super proud of these guys. They did a lot of things right.”

**SCC Girls Cross Country reaches state again:** The Panthers qualified for the Division 2 State meet for the second straight year and placed 11th. “This year’s performance saw significant growth,” said coach Abby Dilcher. “Of the four athletes who ran the course last year, all four improved both their time and their overall individual places from the 2024 state meet.”

**Individual State Qualifiers for B-W and SCC:** Both schools

had success with individual qualifiers at their respective state meets. In wrestling, Trennon Holzer took second, while Brock Swenson and Ayda Miller placed fifth in their weight classes for SCC; Brady Jackman was third in the discus for Central, while B-W’s Dane Veenendall was fourth in the 300 hurdles at the track meet; Braiden Rasmussen qualified for the golf meet for Central; Jack Schauer was sixth at the boys cross country, while Addison Kofal took seventh at the girls golf meet for Central and B-W’s Shannon Fritts advanced to the girls tennis meet for the third straight year.

**Girls Basketball:** The Baldwin-Woodville and St. Croix Central girls’ basketball teams had memorable 2024-25 seasons. Both teams split the conference title and earned a regional title.

The two teams met in a sectional semifinal, with the Blackhawks defeating the Panthers for the third time that season. B-W then fell in the sectional final to Elk Mound, denying a second straight state appearance. In the sectional semifinal, B-W’s Haley Jordt cracked the 1,000-point barrier.

**Max Ramberg National Champion:** B-W graduate and current Augustana University wrestler Max Ramberg won the National Championship at 97kg at the USA Wrestling U23 Greco-Roman Nationals in Ohio.

**Others:** B-W girls’ soccer three-peated as conference champion and lost to West Salem in the sectional semifinal...The St. Croix Central Clay Target team finished 24th out of 80 schools at the USA High School Clay Target League Nationals.



SAM NIEBELING | NIEBELING'S PHOTOGRAPHY  
**Dane Veenendall outrunning defenders and on his way to scoring a touchdown for Baldwin-Woodville this past fall.**

## HAMMOND: Graf

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served the restraining order while she was still a teacher. She resigned when the 2024-25 school year ended, as that case was also dismissed before the school year ended.

**Hammond Heartland Days:** Wally Graf was named Grand Marshal. Graf has been a member of Hammond Lions Club for over 30 years, along with serving on the Village Board for 17 years and currently serves as its Municipal Judge. “Hammond was a great place to raise our kids,” Graf said, as he and his wife, Deb, are the parents of two adult children and grandparents to two. The Biggest Hewart went to Dusty Anderson, owner of Parkside Restaurant and Bar. He’s a proud and active member of the Lions Foundation, a former SCC Rec Board member, a baseball coach, and the driving force behind the Lions Gun calendar.

**Eagle Scout:** SCC senior James Vogt earned Eagle Scout honors, which is noteworthy as four percent of Boy Scouts earn the title. Vogt earned his Eagle Scout by replacing and installing a new flagpole at the River Falls Sportsmen’s Club. “I wanted to do something that was important to me,” he said, about his Eagle Scout.

**One step closer:** Hammond Library held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new library, a 10,500-square-foot one-story building that will be completed in Spring 2026 and will include a community room. “When we were designing the building, we were really thinking of the community and its needs,” said Director Michelle Johnson. “What is their footprint? How do they use it? Where are we going to be 20 years from now?”

**Others:** Amber and Dan Casey filed an official complaint with the SCC School Board, which detailed their daughter being assaulted. Circuit Court Judge Scott Nordstrand granted a four-year restraining order for the Caseys against the assailant... Roberts celebrated its 150th birthday with a three-day event. Activities scheduled were bed races, beard judging, antique cars, and stagecoach displays.

## EDUCATION: Nygaard named Ellsworth Principal

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summa cum laude, nine magna cum laude, and seven cum laude.

**Greenfield raises over \$100K for American Heart Association:** Greenfield Elementary raised the most money from any public school in the United States for the American Heart Association’s Kids Heart Challenge. Staff had a goal of \$90,000. This year’s total was \$100,102.26. “The generosity of Greenfield Elementary and its extended family is overwhelming,” said Physical Education teacher Jon Curtis. “I’m simply blown away. Thank you to all who continue to participate and give generously.”

**SCC Middle School honored by Special Olympics, ESPN:** The St. Croix Central Middle School was selected by Special Olympics as a National Banner School, recognizing its excellence across 10 National standards set by the Special Olympics. In addition, Special Olympics North America and ESPN also chose the Middle School as an ESPN Honor Roll School.

**Nygaard named new Ellsworth Elementary Principal:** The Ellsworth School District announced Jeremy Nygaard as its new Elementary Principal for the 2025-26 year. Nygaard had worked for the

Baldwin-Woodville School District since 2007, serving as a teacher, instructional coach, data analyst, and, most recently, Greenfield Elementary Principal for the 2024-25 year.

**Others:** Dane Veenendall and Miley Smith were selected as B-W’s King and Queen...Braden Underdahl and Kendra Harmon were named as SCC’s King and Queen...Sue Svenningsen announced her retirement after 34 years of teaching, 27 of those were at B-W...The B-W School Board accepted an anonymous donation of \$25,000 toward the Performing Arts Center’s sound system.

## CRIME AND COURTS: Intoxicated, Speeding

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exploitation, and one count of using a computer to facilitate a child exploitation crime.

**Assistant County District Attorney: ‘Judges need to bleed’:** Bela A. Ballo, 32, Hammond, is facing three charges of making threats to three St. Croix County Circuit Court Judges. Ballo is accused of saying the judges have it out for him and are making life difficult for him. He also blamed his poor mental state on the hostile work environment created by the judges: ‘They just need to bleed, he said.

**Baldwin man charged with possession of pornography:** Brock Hayes, 34, Baldwin, was charged with 10 counts of possession of child pornography, along with possessing a child sex doll. The case was boosted from a cyber tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which revealed 285 files of apparent child pornography were uploaded to a phone number, which was confirmed to be Hayes through a subpoena.

**Others:** Amery native Cory Maxon, 36, is charged with theft of movable property valued at more than \$10,000 from his

employer, Lindus Construction of Baldwin...Antonio Thelen, 29, was sentenced to 7.5 years prison for a shooting incident at Ras’ On Main in 2024. The counts were for first-degree recklessly endangering safety and possessing a firearm while being convicted of an out-of-state felony...Former Glenwood City Superintendent Tim Johnson pleaded guilty to three counts of forgery and three counts of misconduct in office. He will be sentenced in March...Vivian Nicole Garley, 22, Baldwin, was charged with attempted homicide after an alleged stabbing incident...

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