

ROUNDTABLE

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The roundtable included local, state and federal representatives, with several local and provincial agencies from Canada attending. In addition, Canadian National Railway, National Weather Service, Customs and Border Protection, medical facilities and the American Red Cross, among elected city and county representatives, sat at the table.

Hundrieser called the gathering a “whole-community meeting,” drawing all the different stakeholders and appropriate agencies from the community together. Koochiching County’s proximity to the boarder added a unique and inter-

national aspect to Wednesday’s meeting, she said.

“We haven’t had a meeting like that in the state, where people got together to have that kind of conversation in advance of an incident, to talk about who we are, who each party is, and the capabilities and resources they would bring to an incident and before and after an incident,” she said.

While many of the representatives already know one another, this meeting offered the opportunity to have “a focused conversation about a focused issue.

“Response is a collective effort and preparedness is a collective effort,” she said. “None of these things happen by one agency or one organization on their own. It’s a comprehensive effort, so there is value in

everyone talking about the plans they have in place, the procedures they have to deal with response, and also how they would plan to interact with others so, if and when an event happens, awareness is there of how we would work together more effectively.”

Appointed to the position in February, Kostiuk said the roundtable helped him learn about the available resources and their capabilities and how they would respond in an incident.

“We’re in a unique situation here,” he said. “Being we’re isolated, we have to draw from so many different people.”

The roundtable gathered the many different agencies together, but also revealed that each of those agencies have connections they can

draw upon if needed, Hedlund said.

“Some of those are redundant connections, but the goal is to get everyone at the table,” he said. “For future tabletop exercises, it’s important to identify the resources we have and maybe identify what we missed or who we missed. Who else should we bring to the table?”

Hundrieser said Wednesday’s roundtable served as an orientation to build upon and to work into a tabletop exercise. A tabletop exercise would pick a potential emergency and discuss a response.

“We can learn from the roundtable and expand and move into a further actual exercise,” Kostiuk said. “We’re learning at each step so much more about the

capabilities we have. And we’re also practicing in case we do have a situation.”

The orientation, tabletop and actual exercises, which would physically practice a response, will prepare the community should an emergency occur, they said.

“What’s important is knowing how to respond to the incident, taking care of lives and saving lives if we need, and evacuating, and then there’s a recovery phase,” Kostiuk said of the planning for an emergency. “We want to make sure we cover everything in the planning.”

Missing from the table Wednesday was U.S. Sen. Al Franken, who has led a federal push for rail safety reforms.

Following the North Dakota incident, Franken and

a group of senators pressed for an emergency order to improve sharing of crude-by-rail information with first responders and local communities

Kostiuk said Franken will be sent a follow-up report on Wednesday’s roundtable.

“I don’t want Koochiching County to be just sitting back and waiting for something to happen,” Kostiuk said. “I am more comfortable being on the leading edge so we’re not scrambling or taking even a second to think — let’s just flip out our emergency action plan and know exactly how we will operate and how we will do things. When you are prepared and trained, the steps we are taking now will save lives and get us prepared.”

TEACHING

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recently accepted at Falls Elementary. This fall, she will transition from a stay-at-home mom back into workforce, and she’s ready.

“I’m excited,” she said. “I miss adults and I miss other people’s kids.”

Well prepared

When considering the children she will meet in just over three months, Olson-Line knows she is ready for the challenge.

“I have a mini preschool in my own home,” she said.

Her children – Olivia, 10; Carter, 7; Carson, 4; and twins Cooper and Cuyler, 3 – have more than prepared her for a classroom of 4-year-olds.

“I knew I wanted to be a teacher,” she said, adding she received her teaching license from the University of Minnesota – Duluth.

After graduating from college, she spent seven years teaching an early childhood class in Esko and parent education classes in Cloquet. She moved to Borderland in 2011 and has been a stay-at-home mother since.

“I wanted to make sure the majority of the time my kids were babies were with me,” she said. “Not everybody gets to do that and I am so fortunate I have been able to.”

Because the twins will be enrolled in preschool next year, Olson-Line said it was the right time to embrace a change.

RRCC

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college drinking is not necessarily the drinking itself, but the negative consequences that result from excessive drinking.

Similar statistics pop up for students using marijuana and other drugs. Addictionhope.com said survey data has shown that marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among college students, with the number of students using marijuana increasing nationally over recent years.

Rainy River Community College is no different.

Stephanie Turban, who wears many hats at the college including director of residential living, academic adviser and student ambassador program coordinator, said she believes substance abuse is a problem on campus as well as in the International Falls community.

“Over the past four years working at the college as the housing director and as an academic adviser, I have seen a number of students struggling with substance abuse issues that have led to legal consequences, dropping out of college, damage to the residence hall property, or trips to the emergency room,” she said.

Others have seen it, too, and because the campus lacks any programs to target substance abuse, administrators felt it was time to do something.

In an effort to tackle the problem, the campus is partnering with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’s “Strategic Prevention Framework Partnerships for Success” grant through the Minnesota Department of

Human Services. The grant is a five-year award focusing on preventing underage drinking among persons 18-20 and marijuana use among persons aged 18-25.

“RRCC participated in a student health survey two years ago, and as a result of that participation, the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ alcohol and drug abuse division reached out to us to see if we would be interested in participating in a grant they were writing to focus on underage drinking and marijuana abuse,” Turban said.

RRCC is one of seven Minnesota colleges and universities participating in the grant. The Strategic Prevention framework focuses on assessment, capacity, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The program will be tailored to the needs of RRCC students, and managed by a coalition of key stakeholders interested in preventing underage drinking and marijuana use. The college will then put together a strategic plan identifying evidence-based strategies to reduce rates of underage drinking and marijuana use, with evaluation of the program at each step of the process.



Stephanie Turban

the remainder of the grant period, funding will be available to carry out our strategic prevention plan and analyze its effectiveness.”

County stats

Turban said she has been a lifelong resident of Koochiching County, and had always thought the area had higher-than-average rates of substance abuse. As she began doing research for the grant, data backed up her suspicion.

“Data for Koochiching County eighth, ninth, and 11th grade students from the 2013 Minnesota student survey shows that students in our community are more likely than the state average to report past 30-day alcohol use, binge drinking, cigarette smoking, marijuana use, and misuse of prescription drugs,” she said. “In addition, the most recent data available shows that the DWI arrest rate as well as the percentage of alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes are also higher in Koochiching County than the state average.”

Turban continued that many people consider drinking alcohol as a “normal” part of college life and changing that perception won’t likely be an easy task.

“This grant work is a great place to start in having community conversations about substance abuse and creating strategies for prevention that will benefit the entire community,” she said. “I am very excited to get started on having these conversations, building relationships with community partners, and bringing positive change to our area.”

Turban will recruit people to become involved with the strategic plan by having

one-on-one meetings with interested coalition members to gain their perspective on the issue. Once the coalition is formed, she said it will be a group effort to create and design the strategic plan and determine how it will be carried out.

“I think everyone in this community can think of at least one person whose life has been affected by substance abuse,” Turban said. “Oftentimes, it is not just the individual that is impacted, but also the families who are witness to how substance abuse can take over someone’s life or even take someone’s life. To build a strong, healthy community, it is crucial that we work together on prevention strategies to stop problem habits before they start.”

RRCC Provost Carol Heland agreed.

“The college and community will benefit from the prevention resources this grant provides in the evaluation and implementation of sustainable activities,” she said. “With the college delivering the human services and chemical dependency programs from Mesabi Range Technical College beginning fall 2015, the timing couldn’t be better to participate in the SPF grant.”

Turban concluded that the ultimate goal of the strategic plan is to have a sustainable prevention program in place on campus and in the community to help students make better choices about alcohol and marijuana use. She said it is her hope that efforts can prevent our students from developing substance abuse issues that could affect them for many years past college.

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