LOCAL NEWS

County departments make employment changes

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

There will be some new faces in various Koochiching County departments in 2015, following action Tuesday by the county board on various employment changes Tuesday.

The board accepted a letter of resignation of Laura Isenor, assistant county attorney. Isenor is resigning because she's taking the same assistant county attorney position in Steele County, Koochiching County Attorney Jeff Naglosky said.

Isenor's last day with the county will be Jan. 2, Naglosky said. The board needed to approve her letter of resignation, he said.

"I don't want to do it, but I'm pretty sure I can't make her stay," Naglosky said jokingly.

Naglosky said he believes Isenor is leaving because the job is closer to her and her husband's family, and the salary is higher. She also had a baby in March, he said, and wishes to be closer to family.

In other business, the board approved the employment separation of two part-time correctional officers, and moved to fill the two vacant positions. Commissioner Brian McBride said the part-time positions have seemed like a "revolving door," and the county can't keep people in the positions very long.

"We've been doing a lot of hiring, and looks like training, and they're not sticking around," McBride said. "And I think we have to be cognizant of that when we look at hires."

McBride said the International Falls Police Department recently hired Justin Franz, who previously was a part-time county sheriff's deputy. Franz was hired to fill a vacancy created by Perryn Hedlund, who will be moving from an officer position with the IFPD to the Koochiching County sheriff position in January.

"So that's a part-time sheriff position now that we've lost, another one to the city," McBride said. "(Franz is) going to be a good officer and a good addition to the police force, and the sheriff's going to miss him."

County Administrative Director Teresa Briggs said usually part-time sheriff's deputies who leave the department for the IFPD will work part-time shifts for the county when they can.

The county board Tuesday also approved the employment separation of Chris Bergquist, who has served as a natural resource manager at the county Land and Forestry Department's Northome office.

County Land Commissioner Dennis Hummitzsch said Bergquist will be taking a position with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Forestry Division.

"This person is here almost two years, but he's a real sharp guy and he's been a real benefit to the department," Hummitzsch said.

An increase in the hours per week for Lindsi Barnhart, health educator for the Koochiching County Health Department was also approved by the county board Tuesday.

Barnhart previously worked 32 hours per week, and will now work the full-time 40 hours per week, Health and Human Services Director Terry Murray said. Her hours are being increased to meet the need of an increased workload, Koochiching County Public Health Supervisor Nancy Lee said.

"For right now, to catch up with what we haven't been getting done with SHIP school work, that's where Lindsi's time will be allocated," Lee said.

SHIP refers to the Statewide Health Improvement Program of the Minnesota Department of Health, which involves work in schools and in the community. The department is still looking for someone to fill the need in the community, Lee said.

"I've actually talked with Terry about being creative in how we get that filled, and we can't get there being creative without a nurse," Lee said. "We just can't get there without having that nurse."

Koochiching County isn't alone in having difficulty finding a public health nurse, Murray said, as counties throughout the state are losing candidates to the private sector.

The board also approved a request to hire a part-time office support worker for the county Veteran's Service Office, as county Veteran's Service Officer Candance Ritch said she can't keep up with the workload.

"I've gotten at least 400-600 percent increases," Ritch said. "They're coming out of the woodwork, with word of mouth."

Ritch said she works as a facilitator for veterans, and helps them fill out the forms and applications they need to receive their benefits. The part-time worker would handle office work like faxing, filing, mailing and answering phone calls, she said.

"I don't have time to do that," Ritch said. "All the complaints you're getting, 'she never answers her phone, she never calls me back,' I don't have time."

SALVATION ARMY ELVES

STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Volunteers prepare gifts purchased through the angel tree program for distribution Thursday. According to Missy Trickel, Salvation Army employee, this year, 415 kids in Koochiching County filled out angel tree wish lists.

Chiefs report on November activities

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Falls Fire Department displayed toys collected during the November "fill the ambulance" event.

International Falls police and fire chiefs reported November activities to the Falls City Council earlier this month.

Fire Chief Adam Mannausau reported four fire call outs: two city responses to Boise Paper and three rural responses involving a gas leak, chip-trailer fire and a backfire of an airplane at the Falls International Airport.

In addition, he reported the department took part in training sessions at the Koochiching County Law Enforcement Center and Rainy Lake Medical Center.

The department in November participated with the annual Border Peace Officer's venison feed at Elks Lodge 1599 provided kids a ride to school in a fire truck, and the "fill the ambulance" toy drive.

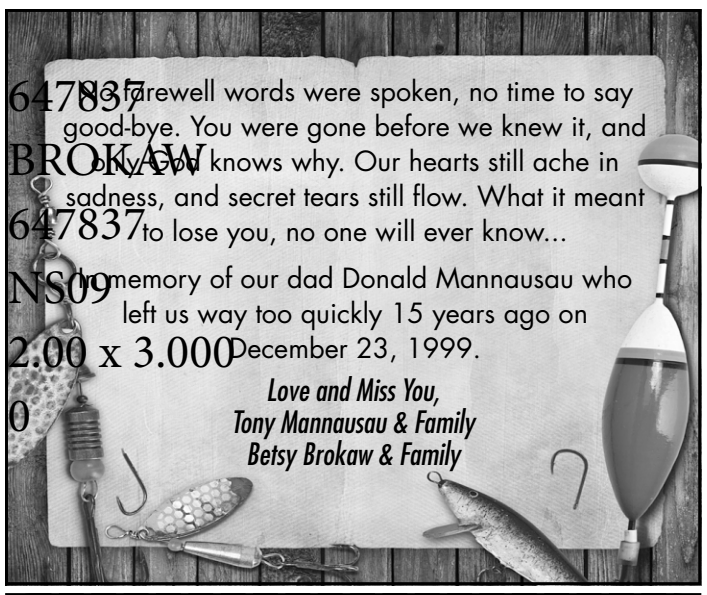
Mannausau, who also serves as the chief of the Falls Ambulance Service, reported emergency ambulance calls in November were up by 10 from the same time in 2013, for a total of 718 for the year. Ambulance transfers to facilities were at 37 in November, one less than the same time last year, for a total of 511 for the year.

Mannausau reported just one housing issue in November, when a rental property without heat was addressed.

Police

Falls Police Chief Mike Musich reported his officers assisted with the annual venison feed in November and he attended a meeting in Hibbing.

Shift activity in November included 281 general calls, 47 traffic stops, 30 medical assists, seven other agency assists, and 18 animal-related calls. He said he could not provide information about the number of incident complaint reports made during the month as a computer was not functioning on the day he was compiling the report.



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