

LOCALNEWS

PREPARING TO PREPARE



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

The AARP Tax Aide program began training volunteers at Kootasca this week. According to AARP district coordinator Bette Simon, the program will start taking appointments on Monday, and begin doing tax preparation on Feb. 3. The program provides free tax preparation for taxpayers with low to moderate income. To schedule an appointment, call 218-283-5236.

KOOCHICHING COUNTY BOARD

County could bring Rule 25 assessments back in house

Community Service Department director will research costs

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

A Koochiching County official this week said the Community Services Department is facing a chemical dependency assessment dilemma.

Terry Murray, director of the county Community Services Department, told the Koochiching County Board this week that the county is currently without someone to perform Rule 25 chemical dependency (CD) assessments.

"I was going to start looking at what our options are," he said Tuesday.

Many referrals to treatment centers are based on the results of a Rule 25 assessment, which refers to the administrative rule that addresses chemical-use assessment, administrative require-

ments and appeal and fair hearing rights of the client. All 87 Minnesota counties, 11 American Indian Tribes, and nine state-contracted managed care organizations are required to provide a Rule 25 assessment to anyone who requests one, or for whom a chemical-use assessment is requested. Use of a standardized, uniform, state-developed assessment tool was implemented in July 2008, according to the Minnesota Department of Human Services website. A 0-4 score from the assessment determines the level of care a patient needs, and what kind of risks are involved.

Last March, the board agreed to contract chemical dependency service assessments on a full-time basis with Sharon Frank, one of the current contracted assessors, with the stipulation that local referrals will be made when necessary.

"It's unfortunate, but the contract with Sharon Frank...part of the agreement was that she wasn't going to be taking any long vacations and she took a month off," Murray said.

"Now, she's gone until February."

In addition, Murray said last week, he was informed that the Rule 25 assessor at Pineview Recovery Center in Littlefork is no longer at the treatment facility.

"Now we've got a whole bunch of people who have to get assessments and we've got nobody to do them," Murray said.

Murray said Frank will return in February, however, he doesn't want to run into similar situations in the future.

Commissioner Wade Pavleck asked Murray if bringing someone from Northland Mental Health in Grand Rapids would be a viable option.

"That's something I could look into and see what the costs are," Murray said.

He continued that another option would be to again have county staff perform the assessments, depending on the cost.

"If Northland isn't an option, I'm going to have to ask to bring it back in house for a number of reasons," he said.

One reason, Murray said, would be he has more con-

trol over people providing the assessment services.

"I could approve a month's vacation," he said. "I have no control of back-up providers...If it comes out that the cost isn't going to be minimal, I think the option would be to keep it back in house."

Still, that could present challenges – including hiring someone to do the assessments.

"The only other person I had trained for (Rule 25 assessments) isn't working with us anymore," he said. "We're in a dilemma right now and I don't know how I can get out of it."

Murray said he would research costs of using Northland Mental Health's services and bringing the assessments back in house.

"I will talk to Northland and bring information of what they would charge and what it would cost to bring it back in house," he said, adding his timeline is minimal because the assessments need to be done on a timely basis.

"We'll make it through, I just don't like to have this happen," he said. "I don't want this to happen again."

Positive reports for L-BF

Board ratifies contract with salary increases for district teachers

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

It was a night of positive reports Wednesday at the Littlefork-Big Falls School Board meeting.

According to L-BF Superintendent Fred Seybert, an audit report shows the district is in "very good, sound financial condition."

"The district has money to utilize in areas of technology," Seybert told The Journal Thursday.

That's a good thing considering the recent increase in enrollment to the school, he said.

Seybert said this school year alone has brought in an additional 50 students to the school with at least 30 more expected to enroll next year.

The draw?

Seybert believes it's the technology L-BF offers.

"The technology here is really top of the line," he said.

Currently, students in grades 2, 3, 4, 10, 11 and 12 each have their own iPad to use for educational purposes. The district spent about \$100,000 on iPads last year with expectations to spend another \$75,000 this year to offer the technology to all grades, excluding kindergarten and first grade.

"The goal is to have one-on-one technology for all the students next year," the superintendent reports, adding that student and teacher input is what has led the

district to the improved technology offerings.

"I think the technology level we have in our school is the wave of the future," Seybert continued. "Parents see that, know that, and want their children to be part of that."

With enrollment increases occurring on what Seybert says is a weekly basis, preliminary discussions of expanding were also held Wednesday.

"We don't have to modify the infrastructure of our building at this time, but there are four classrooms that could be expanded if need be," he said. "However, depending on what enrollment does, the district does have the capital funds to expand (the building) if necessary in the future."

Seybert said committees will meet to consider the school's options and report back to the board during its February meeting.

Following on the heels of the audit report, the board agreed to ratify the 2013-2015 certified contract for the district's teachers. Included in the contract is a 3-percent salary increase for year one and an additional 3-percent increase for year two.



Fred Seybert

VNP is offering guided snowshoe hikes

Voyageurs National Park rangers will lead guided snowshoe hikes through the park this winter.

The hikes are planned for 2-3:30 p.m. on each of the following Saturdays:

- Today
- Feb. 1
- Feb. 8

- Feb. 15
- Feb. 22

Bring your own snowshoes or borrow a free pair from the Rainy Lake Visitor Center. Participants should meet inside the Rainy Lake Visitor Center prior to the start of the hike. No fee or registration is required to attend.



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- ♦ Emergency Room, Urgent Care, and Hospitalist services

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