LOCAL NEWS

INTERNATIONAL FALLS CITY COUNCIL

Falls to get new fire chief soon

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

A new International Falls fire and ambulance chief could be appointed when the Falls City Council meets April 21.

The council heard this week from Falls Mayor Bob Anderson that a candidate may be recommended by that time. He said plans call for Falls Fire Chief Jerry Jensen to work with a new chief for about one month.

Jensen told the council that he will help the new chief to get to know the duties and responsibilities of the position and transition the department.

Jensen will retire after a 30-year career with the International Falls Fire Department. Last year, he was named Fire Officer of the Year for cities with populations of less than 10,000 by the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association.

Jerry Jensen

He said May 23 will be his last working day.

Candidates for the chief position must be a member of the department, said Jensen. Four people applied for the position. The candidates will be interviewed; take a written exam; take part in a staff oral interview and peer interview by chiefs, in this case from fire departments in Virginia, Hibbing and Bemidji. The top three candidates will be interviewed by the mayor next week, said Jensen. Under the city charter, the mayor appoints the chief, with approval by the council.

In related business, the council approved the following to the roster of firefighters: Tommy Baron, John Winkel, Josh Meyers, Zach Scofield, Kyle Rasmussen, James Vance, Mike Carlson and Benjamin Mortenson. The firefighters completed entrance exams conducted by the Falls Firefighters Civil Service Commission.

The council also approved the hiring of Tanner Bombenger and Benjamin Duval to fill two open positions on the ambulance service as paramedics. The council earlier approved increasing the number of paramedics on the Ambulance Service from four to six.

The council also approved the hiring of Paul Kennedy and Chad Mastin as part-time patrol officers on the Falls Police Department.

In addition, the council approved sending a letter to state Rep. David Dill and Sen. Tom Bakk supporting legislation to fund grants to local governments with ice arenas that need to convert cooling plants away from using R-22 refrigerant. By the year 2020, the R-22 refrigerant will no longer be manufactured and imported into the country, which may make it difficult to find and expensive to use.

Councilors said Bronco Arena has been converted, but Kerry Park Arena, which is owned by the city, has not been converted.

The council also approved the mayor's appointment of David Farmer and Mike Rud to the vacant positions on the North Koochiching Sanitary Sewer District Board.

County jail to house Net Lake inmates

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Koochiching County Jail will house inmates from the Net Lake Reservation under an agreement approved this week.

The county board Tuesday approved a contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, upon recommendation of Sheriff Brian Jespersen.

Jespersen told The Journal the agreement will help keep the county's 30-bed facility closer to its maximum capacity and earn the county a little extra money.

The agreement calls for a fee of $60 per day per prisoner. The agreement is contingent upon county Attorney Jeff Naglosky's approval.

Sheriff Brian Jespersen

"It's a decent deal for us," Jespersen said.

The agreement is in place for the rest of this year and will be reconsidered for 2015. Jespersen will report to the board jail activity periodically during the year.

Jespersen said discussions initiated by the BIA about the proposal began about six months ago, when the jail population was down and housing about eight prisoners at that time.

Prisoners from the Net Lake Reservation are now housed in Pennington County, located in the western part of the state, causing reservation officers to spend much of an eight-hour day transporting prisoners to and from the jail there, said Jespersen.

"We are only one hour away, so it will be a two-hour round trip for them," he said.

Net Lake officials have indicated the Koochiching County Jail will house, on average, four to six prisoners each month. Jespersen expects an average stay of four to eight days per inmate.

Jespersen said if the county jail is full of local prisoners, Net Lake prisoners will be turned away and be taken by reservation officers to Pennington County.

While the local jail can house 30 inmates, Jespersen said the maximum number ideally is 26.

"When we are at 22 (inmates), we won't take anymore because we've got to leave room for our local inmates we arrest," he said.

No medical or transportation costs of Net Lake inmates will be paid by Koochiching County, he said.

And, he said, the jail will refuse to accept violent prisoners or prisoners with other issues.

ROTARY ROSES

Rotary Roses Chair Tony Palm congratulated Becky Roeder for selling the most Rotary Roses in 2014. Rotarians sold a total of 725 dozen roses in International Falls and 200 dozen in Baudette. Proceeds for the rose sale benefit youth projects.

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