

# ELECTION2014

The Journal posed questions to candidates seeking positions that will be decided in the Nov. 4 election. We asked candidates to respond by Sept. 14. Candidates who did not respond by that date were not included in this election package. We also limited the responses to a total of 500 words. Candidates in uncontested local elections were only asked to provide a brief biography. The responses are published as they were provided to The Journal. Only spelling errors were corrected.

## International Falls City Council

The following questions were posed to candidates seeking the International Falls City Council East Ward, Center Ward and West Ward positions:

1. Briefly summarize your personal background and experiences.

2. Why are you the best candidate for this office?
3. What do you see as the biggest issue facing International Falls and how would you address it?

4. How would you work to spur economic growth in International Falls?

5. What is the biggest thing you hope to accomplish during your term?

### EAST WARD



#### BRIAN BRIGGS

1) Life-long resident of International Falls. Married with three grown children and four grandchildren who all live in the area. Retired with over 35 years of service with Boise, also 32 years with the US Air Force and the Air National Guard, with 3 tours of duty in the Iraq/Afghanistan wars.

Have been active in the community:

- Over 30 years as a member of the VFW/American Legion Color Guard
- Past Commander of the American Legion
- Currently Quartermaster of the VFW
- Past President of Recreation Hockey
- Member of the City Planning Commission
- Member of RLMC Board of Trustees

2) Because when I served as city councilor from 1997 to 2005 I kept an open mind and listened to what citizens were saying. I brought forth, not only my vision but their vision, on how to make a better community for everyone. I supported projects and organizations such as the Backus Community Center and Borderland Humane Society. I want a solid foundation in our city so my children and grandchildren can retire here like I have.

3) Loss of jobs has been detrimental to our community but I also believe we need leaders who can work together efficiently, not only with each other but with the community as a whole. I also believe we should examine and be accountable for the spending of taxpayer's dollars. I understand raising taxes to keep up with the cost of living, however we also need to look at wants and needs before raising taxes to offset frivolous spending. When I am elected, I will encourage all citizens to be involved through me. I am an east ward candidate but I plan to listen to everyone, represent them and lead by example.

4) By enhancing our infrastructure such as roads, resurrecting the Highway 53 Corridor project, and by investing into the existing businesses and taking an optimistic approach to "growing our own" first.

5) I will work towards a more cohesive council that makes thought out, educated decisions and works well with other councils, organizations and boards. This I truly believe will give us the strength to move our community forward and give taxpayers a say in how their tax dollars are spent and accounted for.



#### LEON DITSCH

A little about myself. I was born, raised, and live in International Falls. I graduated from Falls High School, Rainy River Community College and Bemidji State College. My wife, Roxanne Skogstad-Ditsch, and I have been married thirty-four years and we have two wonderful daughters and one grandson. I have been employed at the Indus School for the past thirty-four years in many different positions—from teacher

to dean of students—and have been president of our local association (union), am a member of the Early Iron Car Club, owner and the instructor of Border Driving School, and my wife and I own a group home that we manage and maintain.

Why am I the best candidate? I do not know if I am, but I do know that I will work hard for the citizens of International Falls and the East Ward. I am willing to learn as I go and put my best foot forward. I will listen to the citizens I represent, be objective to all views, and do what is best for all. I am an ordinary citizen who is running with an open mind. Other than doing what is best for the people and our city, I do not have any ties or loyalty to any political issue or item the City of International Falls may have.

International Falls has many issues that must be pursued now and in the future. We must encourage industrial expansion and economic growth. We are a gateway to Rainy Lake and Canada. We must encourage tourism and give visitors a reason to spend time in International Falls and the surrounding areas (as it is now, the majority of travelers buy gas and maybe groceries and move on to Canada). What can we do to keep the tourist dollar in our locale? We know industry, in all respects, must be encouraged and promoted. It is not just the big manufacturer that must be encouraged, but the little man also. Over the last few years we have seen many small businesses open in the Falls. Many are very successful because of the hard work and risks of those willing to venture forth. We must encourage all businesses and back them however possible. Both large and small business start the dollar rolling and creates a domino effect that enables growth in jobs, students for our schools, and the need for more resources. I will do my best to make this happen.

At the risk of offending many people, I am going to state "We have a dirty town!"

As we enter International Falls from Highway 11-71 it is very attractive and well kept. The same is not so entering from Highway 53. Many of the businesses look shabby and unkempt, grass is growing unchecked, businesses have inventory along with discarded debris in their lots, our city has untrimmed grass and weeds growing through the cracks of our sidewalks. And maybe the worst area is the former Information Center parking lot and shrub area located on the route to Canada and Rainy Lake. The city has ticketed home owners for blight but has done little to eliminate blight in other areas. It is time to take the step to fight city and business blight and I am willing, with the help of our community, to take that step. We all can work together to make International Falls a great city!

Am I the best candidate? I do not know, but I will do the best I can for all. Thank you.

### CENTER WARD



#### HARLEY DROBA

1. I am a 1996 graduate of Falls High School. After graduation I joined the US Army's Signal Corp and graduated both basic training and individual training with honors. I have management experience throughout my career, including positions held at MCI WorldCom, Stewart's Super One and Co-Owner of

International House of Bowling. I proudly have served my community in many ways which include being a member of the International Falls Jaycee's, Icebox Radio Theater, St. Thomas Fundraising Committee, Loyal Order of The Moose, and the Elks Lodge.

2. If elected I would represent both Center Ward and young families of International Falls. Although our whole community felt the effects of the Boise layoffs no one group was hit as hard as the 28-38 age demographic. This piece of our workforce needs representation on our council. There are few opportunities for our young families to secure a living wage here and this will be my focus.

3. Clearly the biggest issue facing our area is the lack of jobs. I strongly believe that manufacturing or multiple internet based businesses is going to be fundamental in our future success. I also believe laying the foundation with these anchor jobs will spur natural growth in other areas such as services and retail.

4. International Falls is working hard right now to spur economic development. I feel that I would be a great addition to the men and women in our community that have been working on this real issue. At this time we need to be vigilant and work together to protect the jobs we have in the community. Now is the time to create an environment where local businesses want to expand and entrepreneurs want to invest in our area.

5. To answer the question on what I hope to accomplish in my term if elected. First I have to tell you a little about how I decided to run.

I disagree with some past decisions made by our city council. Although my goal is and always will be economic development, I don't believe that the creation of the EDA was the best choice at the time. The city has representation with KEDA and for that reason I believe that these entities overlap. Both KEDA and EDA are working hard to bring business into this area and that is a good thing. I look forward to utilizing everything at the cities' disposal to build this community. I want to represent International Falls in the years to come. I am running for this office on the belief that I can work with the other councilors, the mayor and committees with respect. So what do I hope to accomplish? I want to vote on our future, not the past. I want to vote on solutions to issues that face our town no matter whose ideas they are. Once a decision is made I will stand with the council's decision, give it time, evaluate the decision, and determine whether or not it works.



#### JOE SCHWARTZ

1. Resident of I Falls for 25 years. I've raised 2 sons here. I've spent the last

35+ years working on issues concerning working men and women and families. I'm a 24 year Boise employee. Int'l Falls Basketball coach for 13 years. Rec Commission Chair past 6 years. Rec Commission member past 15 years. I'm a member of Int'l Falls Charter Commission. I'm a member of Koochiching Labor Assembly. I was Chair of Labor Day Picnic at Smokey Bear park past 2 Years. I was a member of Int'l Falls Economic Development Exploratory Committee. I'm a graduate of Blandin Community Leadership Foundation. I was a ABB Committee member

of original Save Backus Committee. I spearheaded the effort to secure the new Zamboni for Kerry Park. I'm the Secretary/Treasurer of a multi million dollar organization I.A.M.A.W. Local W33. I'm a Trustee/Auditee of a multi million dollar organization I.A.M.A.W. District W3. I'm a member of the Moose Club. Worked on state and national issues effecting working men, women and families.

2. Int'l Falls is my home. I raised my family here. I'm invested in our community, I'm dedicated and passionate to be a part of creating a better life for all of us. Socially, Economically and Financially.

3. Focus on job creation, manufacturing, warehousing, wood fiber, tourism. Expanding our community and labor force. Housing for our seniors and low income families. Assess our water rate structure to determine ways to lower costs. Keep taxes down. Assess our roads, sidewalks, infrastructure and create a comprehensive plan to fix them.

4. I would work with all of the many agencies that have been created over the last year in what ever capacity they would need help with.

5. To help create a better quality of life for the citizens of International Falls and our neighbors. It would be my privilege to serve as your Center Ward Councilor. I respectfully ask for your vote Nov. 4th and give you my solemn promise to work hard to represent you and your concerns. Thank You.

### WEST WARD



#### CYNTHIA JAKSA

As your city councilor, I presently serve as 2nd vice president

of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities (CGMC) and as your representative on the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and the Minnesota Transportation Alliance. I am the chair of the city's finance and budget committee and cable commission. I serve as treasurer for several non-profits. Married for 43 years, resident of West Ward for 26 years, I have two sons and a dog Winston.

My work at KOOTASCA inspired me to serve on the city council. I led a team who reviewed the county's health and human service needs and met with teens, seniors and parents addressing questions concerning: How fellow citizens are faring? Do we live in decent housing? Can we make a living that provides for our families? Are we welcomed and heard at city hall? My goal as your councilor is to provide an unqualified yes to these questions.

I understand city finances and the tax base. I know our legislative leaders and have earned their respect through my role at the CGMC. My track record includes: successfully increasing Local Government Aid (LGA); keeping city property tax rates flat; helping secure the city's profitable park headquarters; voting for our new nursing home; initiating video recordings of council meetings; helping revive the city's Public, Educational and Government (P.E.G.) channel; and developing a city wetland plan.

I know that growth is crucial to solving our fiscal problems. With more jobs, more residents and more city water customers, water and sewer rates will come down. We are controlling water costs by restructuring jobs to reduce labor costs, installing automated

meter readers and seeking more savings.

I am running because I want to complete the work we started: finish developing our warehousing site and rail spur; fully develop the east riverfront complex for tourism and community use; promote new wood fiber businesses and work for partnerships with Fort Frances, including the Medical N.A.F.T.A. initiative, Ranier and the county.

To spur economic growth, I continue to work with the Fort Frances council to foster a shared regional identity. Together the two cities are at the center of a wood basket in a pristine watershed stretching from Lake Superior to the Hudson Bay and share the busiest rail port of entry on the continent. As gold mines open up near Fort Frances, International Falls will see increased trade. By partnering with sister cities Fort Frances and Ranier and making the right investments in public infrastructure, our city can be a hub for gold mining, wood fiber manufacturing, transportation and tourism.

My second-term goals are: bring a warehousing and assembly business to the city's multi-modal site; develop and fund a pilot project for our citizens to access renal dialysis services in Fort Frances; improve our housing stock and infrastructure and nurture community pride and civic engagement. In closing, I want to say that I feel privileged to serve my West Ward constituents and all city residents and ask for your continued support.



#### CHARLES C. LEPPER

Personal Background and experiences: Married to wife, Carol (48 years) with two adult daughters. Lepper is a life-long resident. I served 18 years as a Koochiching County Commissioner and 10 years as a member of the school board for International Falls School District 361. Years of experience on the KDA and KEDA Board. Served on Area Transportation Partnership with MnDOT. Served on the airport commission. Served on the Arrowhead Regional Corrections Board. Served on KOOTASCA Action Council and 25 other boards and committees.

The best candidate: I am the best candidate running for West Ward Councilor with 18 years of elected public service to the people of this area and 18 years of budgetary experience. I oppose a regressive city sales tax that harms low income people disproportionately. Instead, I favor focusing on conservative spending and an emphasis on the core functions of city government. We need to live within our means and stop spending money we don't have. We must hope for the best, but govern for the worst.

The biggest issue facing International Falls: International Falls continues to be challenged by population loss and the resulting loss of tax revenue. As bad as this problem has become, it gets worse when city councilors spend like we are a boom town. We have to govern the city we have; not the city we would like to have.

Promoting growth: Businesses like to grow; it's what they do. We have a great deal of hardy creative residents looking for both business opportunities and for growth. City government needs to work together and with other government bodies (other area council, school, county)

to provide these people with roads, sewer & water and public safety. Then stay out of their way. Area economic development efforts must not be duplicated. The successful economic development efforts in Minnesota have been almost exclusively in areas of population and economic growth; where businesses are locating anyway and appreciate some coordination.

First term goals: By the end of my first term, I would like to see a fully united city council governing with fully grounded ideas providing the best core function of municipal government to the citizens of International Falls.



#### JOANN SMITH

1. I grew up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in the small town of Engadine. The population of Engadine is approximately 924, with a median age of 51. After graduation I attended Michigan Technological University and obtained my B.S. in mechanical engineering. I then moved to International Falls, MN to work at Boise as an engineer until the recent layoffs. My husband and I own the Viking Bar and I am currently going back to school for business administration. I am familiar with small town living and the challenges it can have. I have worked hard in creating growth in my business and I can use these experiences to help develop a strong future for our town.

2. I believe that I am the best candidate for this office because I understand the issues of living in a small town. It is hard for people to find jobs that pay more than minimum wage, school systems and programs suffer because of funding, city projects have to be scrutinized because money can only be divided into so many areas, small businesses are not able to reach their potential due to the smaller population and competition of outside sources, and it is difficult to find larger companies or businesses that want to invest in such a small town that is a long distance from suppliers. I believe that by understanding these issues, I will be able to help this town overcome these problems by adding new ideas and ways of growing and developing our town.

3. The biggest issue currently facing International Falls is the need for economic growth. Creating growth will help in more areas than just creating jobs. It will generate more students in our schools, better funding for our city and improve our overall quality of life.

4. Creating economic growth is not something that happens overnight. It takes time and energy from not only the City Council, but also members of our community. I want to devote the time, energy, and resources that I have to make International Falls prosper. I think that everyone seems to be focusing on one large facility coming to International Falls, but what about having multiple smaller businesses coming here? I think that all options need to be explored and questioned, and the best fit for our town should be acted upon with urgency.

5. I hope to accomplish more than just one thing. I hope to create economic growth, create pride in our town through city improvement projects such as fixing roads, and find ways to make the most of our City's money by questioning what we are doing and what we are not doing.