

GROVER

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“He’s here, he knows our school,” she said. “One concern I would have with our other candidate that’s out there is the training she’s going to have because she’ll be in her current position until Mr. Nelson is gone.” Still, the other three members were convinced – at first. “No matter who we hire tonight, there’s a learning curve,” Kostiuk said. “Anybody we hire, it’s going to take a lot of time. Any job you start, it takes time and you learn along the way.”

Before any motions were on the table, Nelson went through criteria board members should consider when hiring a superintendent. Kostiuk said his motion to hire Carman referred back to the outline provided by Nelson. “She’s got experience at the highest level next to superintendent as a principal,” he said. “She’s very positive and very motivated...I think she brings so much to the table with experience.” Dault and Wenberg agreed. “The biggest criteria for me is the administrative experience which I saw



Kevin Grover

in Ms. Carman,” Dault said. “That was the deciding factor for me.” Discussions quickly got heated as opinions on whether C a r m a n would stay in the district or if the board would find itself in the same position two years down the road. “How long is she going to stay?” member Mike Holden asked. “You don’t have any guarantees from someone coming in from out of town how long they’re

going to stay...Kevin Grover has put his time in here... He’s not gonna go out the door.” While Kostiuk agreed, he pointed out Grover is not from International Falls and said it was unfair to base a decision on if someone would remain in the position for an extended amount of time. “I’d rather take my chances with someone who has proven 13 years here,” Holden said. “That’s one area (my decision is based on).” Seeing neither side appeared ready to budge on its vote, Wagner suggested the board sit on the decision for “about a week” and come

back to the table. Dault, however, said he was not willing to delay the process any longer. After a 15 minute recess, a motion was again made to hire Grover and on a 4-2, it passed. Dault, this time, voted in favor. “I wasn’t going to continue the delay in the process,” Dault told The Journal Thursday. “It’s time to get the superintendent hiring over and move on. There’s a lot of work to do.” Dault said he originally voted for Carman because of her experience, but noted Grover “is a hard worker” and “will figure it out.” “Somebody had to take

charge and as the chair, I decided it needed to be me,” he added of changing his vote. “The top two (candidates) were well-qualified and very close. Beth had an excellent interview just not as much experience.” Dault said he plans to support Grover in the new position and will help him succeed how ever he can. In conclusion, Dault stressed his desire to have an odd-numbered board. “We need an odd number on the board,” he said. “Diversity on a school board is a good thing, but when you end up on different sides of an issue, an odd number can easily resolve it.”

RLMC

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a low volume of patients, Odegaard said. When the amount of patients, or customers, a facility has is low or constantly fluctuating, it becomes a constant challenge. Reimbursement cuts by Medicare and other insurance payers also makes for tough margins, he said. “It’s really a difficult challenge to meet ever-increasing health care costs and ever-decreasing reimbursements,” Odegaard said. “And then to continue to provide high-quality care, you throw that in there too, and it makes for a very extremely difficult challenge.” Over 11 years at Bigfork Valley, Odegaard said he was able to grow the facility and meet those challenges, as well as receive some of the best patient experience scores in the country. He presided over an expansion to the hospital, a remodel and renovation of the existing hospital space, added chiropractic and wellness services, expanded the radiology department and the retail pharmacy services, among other projects. The current state of the RLMC facilities is similar to the situation Odegaard had when he started at Bigfork Valley, he said, and are in need of upgrades. However, the technology at RLMC is better than the technology Bigfork Valley had when he started. The staff in place is also very good, he said. “I’m very pleased with their level of competence and their energy and excitement with the changes that are going on,” Odegaard said. “I’m happy to be here and working with them.” While working as CEO, Odegaard said he strives for transparency, and likes to involve as many staff members as necessary in decision making and strategic planning processes. He empowers the managers of the different hospital departments to run their departments as successfully as possible.



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

New Rainy Lake Medical Center Chief Executive Officer Dan Odegaard says he’s up for the challenge of providing top-quality care and improving patient experience.

“I create the environment, and support the environment where physicians can provide the highest quality of care that’s possible,” Odegaard said. “That’s really my leadership style right there: Creating the environment where all of the employees, all the physicians, all the nurses, all the technicians can excel to a level that provides the patient with the best experience possible.” Odegaard said he’d watched RLMC during his years in Bigfork, and seen the turnover the facility had in the CEO position, and wanted to help provide consistent leadership. He loves helping people and providing them with high-quality health care, he said, and through his position as CEO, he can do something special for the people in International Falls and Koochiching County. “I’ve been doing it in Bigfork, and I think I can do the same thing in International Falls,” Odegaard said. In addition to providing the best-quality care possible, Odegaard said some of his other goals include a new hospital, improved surgery opportunities, imaging services, wellness services, and expanding the specialty physician services. To accomplish those goals, Odegaard will need to work well with the RLMC Board, which he said is made up of great people who’ve shown courageous leadership. “They want to improve the quality of care here and

expand services in town, and to provide the highest-quality experience to the people living here,” Odegaard said. “I hope we can continue a very fruitful and profitable relationship for many years.” When he was at Bigfork Valley, Odegaard said he paid attention to the RLMC as another health care center in the region, as well as following International Falls in the news. Like anyone else in Minnesota, he said he was aware of International Falls’ reputation as “The Icebox of the Nation,” but has also vacationed here in the summers. “It’s not too far from where I grew up, so it’s kind of like it’s home, it’s northern Minnesota,” Odegaard said. “It’s a beautiful part of Minnesota.” Odegaard grew up in Thief River Falls, where he played multiple sports in high school. It was there during his junior year where he realized he wanted to study biology, he said. “I was in biology class and just had one of those ‘tada’ moments, that I really enjoyed biology, the study of life,” Odegaard said. “It really caught my interest so when I went on to college after that, I pursued additional studies in biology.” Following high school, Odegaard went to junior college, where a friend with a shared interest in biology and health care convinced

him to join the U.S. Navy, which had a great hospital corpsman program. “I ran off and joined the Navy, and I’m glad I did,” Odegaard said. His last two years in the Navy he served with the Fleet Marine Force as a field medic, he said, where he gained valuable experience in field medicine. After his service, he returned to college to finish his degree and moved into hospital administration, he said. His Navy career and experience significantly influenced his career as a CEO and administrator, Odegaard said. It gave him a broad knowledge of how health care clinicians work, which combined with his business degree in accounting gives him unique expertise, he said. “I have experience and training in both areas, which allows me to, I believe, make better decisions because I understand both sides very well,” Odegaard said. Growing up in a small town, and working as Bigfork Valley’s CEO has helped Odegaard understand the impact of having to leave an area for health services, he said. If people aren’t sure about a service being offered at the hospital, he said, they can just call and ask. “If they inquire, they may find out that the hospital here in International Falls provides services they don’t have to travel outside of town to get,” Odegaard said. By achieving the goal of providing high-quality services and experiences, Odegaard said they can stop people leaving town for services, and instead start pulling people in to town for the services. “How did we get people to drive to Bigfork for services?” Odegaard asked. “Are they getting top-quality services in Bigfork? Obviously they were, because they were driving a long ways to get the highest patient satisfaction experience.”



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

Elena Favela shows Katie Clark Sieben the industrial maintenance classroom at Rainy River Community College Thursday.

RRCC

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Department of Employment and Economic Development commissioner; and Sue Collins, NEHED president, toured the existing nursing clinic along with Elena Favela, interim dean of students and other RRCC staff. The college’s current nursing program works to feed the local health care industry with qualified workers, Favela said. With 30-35 nursing students learning in a space that had 20 students when the program started in 1977, things have become cramped, she said. The current facility is also outdated, LeAnne Hardy said, and is in need of new equipment so students can learn how to use modern equipment. The bonding funding would go towards renovations and updates the space needs, she said. Hardy serves as director of RRCC’s student services. The nice part about a small college is the small

bonding request can go a long ways, Collins said. In the wake of layoffs in September at the local paper mill, Favela said RRCC has done well to provide opportunities for laid-off workers to find a new career path. Ten workers express interest in the nursing program, and five look into the revamped industrial maintenance program returning in the fall. “The role Rainy River has played in getting people back on track has made a real impact on people’s lives,” Clark Sieben said. At the state level, Pogemiller said, there’s been a push to share resources and services across campuses to make sure students are getting the experience they need. Through the recent upgrades to its telepresence room, RRCC is working toward that end, Favela said. However, administrators and staff can’t lose sight of the ultimate goal. “The focus has to be on making sure students benefit from the collaboration,” Favela said.



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