



COVID-19

**After six years,
Medford administrator
to say goodbye**

By ANDREW DEZIEL
andrew.deziel@apgsomn.com

After a six-year tenure, Medford City Administrator Andy Welti has submitted his letter of resignation.

Medford's City Council is expected to consider Welti's resignation at a meeting Monday (Dec. 28) night, along with the pathway forward. It will be the last meeting before Mayor-elect Danny Thomas and two new members of the City Council are sworn in next week.



Welti

A Plainview native, Welti graduated from Minnesota State University, Mankato with a bachelor's in secondary social studies education and an emphasis in geography. After graduation, he returned to his hometown and ran for a seat in the Minnesota Legislature.

In an upset, Welti defeated incumbent Rep. Bill Kuisle, R-High Forest Township and served for six years representing Plainview, Chatfield, Dover, Elgin, Stewartville and Rochester. After serving as a legislator, Welti moved to Milwaukee to teach at inner-city schools.

Welti went back to school to get his master's in public administration, and began working through Community and Economic Development Associates, also known as CEDA. Through CEDA, Welti helped Medford to put together its Comprehensive Plan in 2014 and was later hired as interim city administrator after the departure of Heather McCallum. In 2015 he was confirmed as the city's full-time administrator.

Welti didn't have much to say about where he's going next, but the outgoing administrator expressed gratitude for the opportunity given to him by the City of Medford. During his tenure, he helped to create and implement ambitious plans for the city.

"I want to thank the city of Medford for allowing me to serve as admin for the last six years and I wish it the best in its future endeavors," he said.

Mayor Lois Nelson, who was defeated in her bid for a fourth term in November, worked closely with Welti throughout her tenure. When she was re-elected to a second (non-consecutive) term in 2012 she faced major challenges, including a steep deficit.

Thanks in part to Welti's leadership, Nelson said the city made significant progress in improving its finances through a finance plan, as well as implementing a detailed and effective capital and street maintenance plans.

Welti kept his eye on the ball with larger projects as well. In the early part of his tenure, the council pushed hard for a \$4 million municipal building to provide a community gathering spot and much needed space for the city's Fire and Public Works departments.

See CARGO on 2A

See MEDFORD on 2A



Steele County Public Health Director Amy Caron receives the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine from Amber Aaseth, the department's assistant director, in a video on Monday to build public trust in the vaccine. (Lisa Kaczke/southernminn.com)

'PRECIOUS CARGO'

County Public Health begins receiving COVID-19 vaccine

By LISA KACZKE
lisa.kaczke@apgsomn.com

After waiting for it to thaw, Steele County Public Health Director Amy Caron received the department's first dose of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in a video on Monday.

"No burning or anything like that," Caron said afterward. "I barely noticed it actually."

Caron received the vaccine during her COVID-19 video update on Monday, which can be viewed on Steele County's Facebook page, to give the public confidence in the vaccine.

Individuals will have to weigh their own risk when deciding to get the vaccine and health officials already know some residents won't receive the vaccine because they're hesitant about it, she said. She added that she hopes receiving the vaccine publicly can build trust in it.

"By the time we get to these larger public (vaccination) clinics, hopefully



A vial of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine thaws before it's administered to Steele County Public Health staff on Monday. (Lisa Kaczke/southernminn.com)

enough of us have gone through it that they can see that they did alright," she said.

The vaccine will be distributed through a highly coordinated approach, said Rice County Public Health Director

Deb Purfeerst.

"People should not be calling and asking to be put on a list for a vaccination," she said. "Messaging will go out when vaccination is available."

Meanwhile, the surge in COVID-19 cases in Minnesota is lessening. Minnesota's positivity rate for COVID-19 tests has dropped to 4.1%, which Caron said is "drastically down" from the previous two months. She said she hopes people kept their gatherings to a minimum during Christmas like they did during Thanksgiving, which helped lower the number of cases.

"Unfortunately, I think it has helped a little bit to have the bars and restaurants not have that indoor dining, although I know we can't sustain for long because that takes a toll on our businesses," she said.

Vaccine supplies

While Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine is going to medical facilities, public health agencies are receiving the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, which requires two doses 28 days apart.

See CARGO on 2A

Feds make dramatic broadband investment in southern Minnesota

By ANDREW DEZIEL
andrew.deziel@apgsomn.com

With local governments across Minnesota struggling to reach the state's lofty rural broadband goals, the federal government has stepped in, delivering a truckload of grant money to a Minnesota-based company expected to deliver fiber-optic coverage throughout southern Minnesota. But questions and concerns abound.

Earlier this month, the Federal Communications Commission formally allocated \$9.2 billion in rural broadband grants, with Minnesota receiving more than \$400 million, the fourth largest of any



Pettis



Folsted

Minnesota, but it stretches as far south as Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as far west as Huron, South Dakota, and as far north as Alexandria.

With the new grant funding in hand, LTD is set to dramatically expand its reach, entering into a dizzying array of new markets. In Minnesota alone, it's set to reach more than 100,000 new customers.

A significant number of those new potential customers will be local. A map of the winners created by Cooperative Network Services shows LTD's projects would dramatically expand fiber-optic coverage locally, especially in rural Le Sueur, Steele and Waseca counties.

See BROADBAND on 2A



The Federal Communications Commission is spending big on rural broadband, and in Minnesota has made a massive bet on a single provider, LTD Broadband. (File photo/southernminn.com)

