



County of Ottawa

Administrator's Office

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County Administrator's Weekly Digest May 14, 2010

CLERK-REGISTER OF DEEDS WORK SESSION

The County Board and Administration committed to conduct a survey this summer of counties that have the Clerk-Register combination in place.

We invite any local unit officials, County officials and staff, Commissioners or other interested parties to submit questions for inclusion in the survey by Friday, May 21 at 5:00 p.m. We will draft a survey for Commissioner review after that date.

COUNTY CONSIDERS NACO VIDEO PROMOTIONAL PROGRAM (Keith Van Beek)

The Board of Commissioners has set as a goal in their strategic plan to investigate and pursue new communication methods to maintain and enhance communication with citizens and other stakeholders. The county website, miOttawa.org, has been confirmed by the Board as the hub for this communication, to create a "brand" and the one-stop source for information. While videos describing Ottawa County and its services have been utilized in limited ways, the overall cost of production has been a limiting factor to further develop informative and valuable presentations.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) recently formed a partnership with CGI Communications to provide a set of video promotional programs at no cost to the county. Several other counties across the nation, and the state, have signed up under this program. The videos would be highlighted on our website, and then users linked to their server. CGI would be responsible to produce the video at their cost, while giving full edit and approval to the County. Potential video segments could include; Welcome to Ottawa County, History and Culture, Real Estate and Relocation Services, Recreational Activities, and more.

Staff will continue to evaluate this as an option. A particular area of investigation is the business model of CGI, where sponsorship opportunities are sought in the community by CGI that would be highlighted on the link from miOttawa.org to the CGI site. Staff wants to make sure proper policies and approvals are in place to protect against questionable organizations being associated with the County in anyway.

OTTAWA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE WATER RESOURCE STUDY (Mark Knudsen)

Ottawa County currently faces many challenging issues associated with aquifers and groundwater. There are instances in which aquifers in certain areas of the County have not had the capacity to sustain the withdrawal levels of new development. The increased demand for groundwater has also generated discussion regarding the impact that water withdrawals have on surface water volumes. There are also locations where contaminant levels (e.g. brine, nitrates, etc.) are increasing in aquifers that are being used for potable water, and it is unknown whether withdrawals (existing and/or new) are exacerbating these levels and/or the transport of these contaminants.

In addition to questions regarding withdrawals, there are concerns about the potential long-term impacts of pharmaceutical agents, cleaning chemicals, and other contaminants that are discharged from septic systems into the ground. In addition, Ottawa County experienced record rain and

snowfall in 2008 and 2009 which resulted in widespread, elevated water table levels. The higher-than-normal water table, subsequently, flooded homes that were built during times when water table levels were low.

In response to these concerns, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners requested that a countywide study of water resources be conducted. The Ottawa County Planning Commission issued a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) this week to hire a consultant for the purpose of completing an Ottawa County Water Resources Study. The issuance of this RFP has been postponed numerous times as many consultants have had strong, but very divergent, opinions regarding the approach that should be taken to achieve the County's objectives. After months of discussion, it was determined that no consensus could be achieved regarding the "best approach" for this project. The only clear item to emerge is that every consultant has a completely different approach regarding the resolution of Ottawa County's hydrology challenges.

The lack of consensus has resulted in the development of an RFP that does not define the methodology or approach that must be used to complete the study. Each consultant will be responsible for identifying, defining, and justifying their customized solutions/proposals.

The decision-making tool(s) that will be developed as a result of this study must, at minimum, accomplish the following objectives:

- A. Minimize the impact of development on an aquifer's ability to sustain current and future water withdrawal demands, as well as any adverse effects on water table levels and surface water levels
- B. Minimize the impact of development water withdrawals on domestic well quality (e.g. brine and nitrates)
- C. Minimize the potential infiltration of wastewater contaminants (e.g. nitrates, phosphates, pharmaceuticals, industrial/household chemicals) in areas relying on septic systems and domestic wells
- D. Minimize the potential hydrologic impacts of impervious surfaces that may be associated with new development, such as reductions in groundwater recharge, reductions in surface water quality, and rapid surges in surface water levels
- E. Prevent the negative effects of elevated water table levels on new development (e.g. basements, foundations, and footings)

Proposals from consultants will be accepted through June 4, 2010. The Planning Commission will be discussing the appointment of a committee that will review and score proposals at their May 24, 2010 meeting. It is likely that the committee will be comprised of representatives from the Planning Commission, Environmental Health, Drain Commissioner, and local units of government. To that point, we will be contacting supervisors and city managers from local units of government to ascertain their interest in being appointed to this committee. After a consultant is selected, a timeline for the study will be established. It is anticipated that the study will take approximately 18-24 months to complete.

MAY EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER



COUNTY CONNECTIONS

First Annual “Katty Shack” Race a Success (By Deanna Sears & Joan Grillo)

On Saturday, April 24th approximately 400 runners and walkers came out to support the first annual “Katty Shack” race to benefit the Crime Victim Foundation, a non-profit organization which assists victims of crime with expenses otherwise not covered by insurance or other reimbursement programs.

Joan Grillo, Victim Rights Coordinator for the Ottawa County Prosecuting Attorney, and Natalie Brown, the mother of homicide victim Katherine Brown, organized the fund raiser in honor of Katherine, known to her friends as “Katty Shack”. Katherine was a cross country runner at Michigan State University. She, along with brothers Tyler and Jeremy Zimmer, and their mother, Sharmaine Zimmer, were victims in the 2008 arson/homicide case in which Troy Brake has been convicted in the Ottawa County Circuit Court. (See Katty Shack, 2)



Getting to Know: Richard J. Kloote (By Penni A. DeWitt)

Judge Kloote was born and raised in Grand Rapids. He graduated from Grand Rapids Junior College and earned a Business Administration degree from Michigan State University. He obtained his Juris Doctor Degree from the Detroit College of Law. Upon graduating, he worked three and a half years as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney in Kent County. Following that, he practiced family law in Grandville and worked primarily in Kent and Ottawa County courts while residing in Jenison. He was also an Adjunct Instructor of Criminal Procedures at Grand Rapids Junior College.

Judge Kloote was elected to the 58th District Court bench in 1982, and he plans to retire in 2012 after having served five consecutive six year terms as Judge of the Grand Haven District Court. In that capacity he served 13 years as Chief Judge of the court and 10 years as Chief

Judge Pro Tem when Judge Susan Jonas succeeded him as Chief Judge in 1996.

Judge Kloote recalls serving as Chairman of the County’s Justice Users Committee since its origin in the early eighties. He is currently a member of the Michigan District Judges Association and a 25 year member of the Association’s Court Rules Committee. Judge Kloote is frequently asked to sit as a visiting judge in Muskegon and Kent Counties.

His first wife of 27 years (Ivov) lost a long battle with cancer in 1989. Some time later, Judge Kloote was en route to Alabama for a week of fishing. Very providentially, he stopped to help a stranded motorist on an expressway in Kentucky. He not only helped fix the motorist’s car, he eventually convinced the motorist, Marcia, to move from Nashville to Michigan. This December they will celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary. They reside in Grand Haven Township and have three children and five grandchildren.

Since his teen years, Judge Kloote has been an active member of the Reformed Church in

America and has served in various capacities at local, regional and national levels. He spent nine years on the Board of Directors of Bethany Christian Services, serving seven as president. As part of that experience he traveled to South Korea three times, each time returning with orphaned children, being greeted at various airports by anxiously waiting adoptive parents and families here in the states. In fact, one of the children he escorted was adopted and raised here in Ottawa County.

Although he states his license is not current at the present time, Judge Kloote enjoyed fifteen years flying as a private pilot. Over those years he was occasionally asked by the Marine Division of the Ottawa County Sheriff’s Department to fly low along the lakeshore, assisting them in their search for drowning victims. He indicated that for the past fifteen years his joy of flying has been replaced by the fun of sailing, traveling, woodworking in his “man cave”, enjoying music, and spending time with his blended family. ■

Newsletter Editorial Board

Sherry Costello Penni DeWitt Shannon Felgner
Kim Hewitt Victoria Hutchins
Laura Mousseau Karen Woodford

Thank you for your suggestions for the newsletter. We encourage you to continue submitting them to any Newsletter Board member. Every idea is considered even if it does not appear in a newsletter. The Newsletter Editorial Board reserves the right to edit submissions as needed.

Inside This Issue

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Katty Shack

The event raised over \$8,000 to benefit the foundation. Joan and Natalie have plans to repeat the 5K and 1 Mile run/walk next year which will include chip timing for fast finish results.

Many supporters lined the course and the finish line to cheer on the runners and walkers during the event, which was only slightly dampened by the wet, chilly spring weather. For more information about this year's race or plans for future fundraising events to benefit the foundation, please visit kattysackrace.webs.com. 📍



On the Job with Karen Echter

Karen started in August of 2000 as **Payroll Specialist** in the Fiscal Services Department. Prior to that, she processed payroll for 29 years at a local manufacturing company until they closed. While there are different levels of education and work experience required for payroll positions anywhere, assets include common sense, stress management (especially at year end and when computers do not cooperate), patience, attention to detail and accuracy.

There have been many changes in payroll processing during the past ten years. Changes include a transition from manual processes to automated reporting, web based reporting to State and Federal offices, and computer program enhancements all making the job more interesting and challenging.

In addition to payroll, Karen is responsible for extra payments throughout the year such as longevity pay as well as reports to various departments or government entities and the W-2 forms issued in January. Karen works closely with Human Resources noting deduction changes, insurance enrollments, address changes and more.

Congratulations to Karen who plans to retire August 31 of this year!

Payroll Questions:

- Discrepancies in hours worked usually are better questioned at the department level first.
- Both Human Resources employees and Karen can help with issues regarding deductions for health, MERS retirement, 457 plans, tax exemption withholding, and many other issues.
- Karen can help with wage or tax exemption information requests for various personal needs.
- Karen can be contacted at extension 4848 to answer payroll questions. Or, she can identify the person who can answer the question. 📍

NOTE: "On the Job" is a new feature and Karen is the first employee selected to participate!

How a Timecard Becomes a Check:

Every pay period begins and ends with the employee. Hours worked are reported to the supervisor then recorded into the payroll system by each department. Karen adjusts the submitted wage data, accounting for things like short term disability payments, insurance opt out payments, 457 deferred compensation contributions, tax exemption changes, and other deductions. When all the entries are verified, Karen runs a program to calculate all taxes and deductions to determine each individual's net pay.

After some balancing processes, the checks are released to be printed. After printing, they go to the Treasurer's Office for distribution to the employee. At that point, Karen transmits the direct deposit information to the Federal Reserve so that funds can be deposited into bank accounts on payday. Employees are encouraged to participate in the direct deposit program. 📍

Don't be the Weakest Link

Six simple steps to protect your computer against viruses, spyware and other threats (By Dave Hulst)

The risk of experiencing problems from viruses, spyware and adware can be reduced with a few basic precautions. Technology provides a level of protection but the "human factor" is the key link in the security chain. Here are a few simple tips to help you strengthen that chain.



1. **Subscribe.** Keep Your Antivirus Subscription Up-To-Date. The "Virus Definition File" date can be found in the program. For your personal computer, you can purchase subscriptions of one, two or three years. Don't forget to renew.

If you use a County laptop, regularly bring your laptop to work, connect it to the network and make your definition current. There is no telling what you might pick up when you are connecting on someone else's network or wireless connection.

Non-County computers must have protection if they are going to connect to the County network. We often assume compliance, but it is appropriate to check.

2. **Keep It Private.** If you receive e-mail (or phone call) asking to verify personal information, (name, address, **Social Security Number**) assume it is an attempt to steal your identity.

3. **Be Skeptical.** E-mails that exaggerate claims are using fear to cause you to make a bad decision and do what they say. Don't react to overstated claims.

4. **Don't Pass It On.** You receive an e-mail that asks you to forward it to **X** number of friends, delete it and don't clog the network and mail servers with chain mail.

5. **Kill the Popup.** While viewing a website, a popup appears such as an advertisement. **Don't click in the box, Don't click on the X to close it, Do use Task Manager to kill the popup.** (Press Ctrl – Alt – Delete, Click **Task Manager**, select the popup from the list of Tasks in the Applications Tab, click the **End Task** button).

6. **Don't Spread It.** Don't assume a USB drive, disk, SD Card or any other form of portable media is safe. Scan it before you use it.

Malware is a generic term for **Malicious Software** that infects your computer. Specific terms are:

- **Virus.** A computer program that can reproduce itself, and damage files and programs.
- **Spyware.** Programs coming from websites to collect personal and computer information. These programs can redirect your browser and slow your computer.
- **Adware.** Do you have a popup problem? Multiple, unpredictable and perhaps inappropriate popups appear without warning. These adware infections are a form of spyware that places ads based on information captured about your web surfing habits. ■

Kounty Kudos

Professional Milestones:

- **Doug Flamboe, Pam Wheeler and Beth Schipper** (Information Technology Department) have all been awarded the Help Desk Institute's professional certification for "Support Center Analyst." This certification reflects successful completion of training and testing in strategies for effective customer care and problem resolution, as well as the fundamentals for help desk, support center, and customer support processes. Everyone in the User Services group now holds this certification. Stop by the Help Desk to see their certificates proudly displayed. Congratulations Doug, Pam, and Beth!

Births:

- **Scott Schroeder** (Health Department) and wife Janine welcomed a son, Owen Glen, on April 14. Owen weighed 7lbs 3oz and was 19.5 inches long.
- **Adam London** (Health Department) and his wife welcomed a daughter, Elizabeth Anne, on April 28. Elizabeth weighed 9lbs 2oz and was 21 inches long.
- **Pam Ten Brink** (Community Mental Health) and her husband, Kelly, welcomed a son, Emerson Lee, on November 18. Emerson weighed 8lbs 12 oz.
- **Cori Hedberg** (Community Action Agency) and her husband welcomed a daughter, Rylan Michele, on February 5. Rylan weighed 9lbs 6oz and was 20 inches long.

Send submissions for this column to Shannon Felgner at anytime throughout the year! ■

Then and Now.....Memorial Day (By Victoria Hutchins)

Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, National Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order No. 11. The holiday was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

After World War I, the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring all Americans who died fighting in any war. It is now celebrated in almost every state on the last Monday in May passed by Congress with the National Holiday Act of 1971.

To help re-educate and remind Americans of the true meaning of Memorial Day, the "National Moment of Remembrance" resolution was passed in December of 2000. The resolution asks that at 3 pm local time, all Americans "voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to *Taps*." ◻



Dependent Eligibility for Health Insurance (By Erin Rotman)

To be eligible for health insurance, any child over the age of 19 (but less than age 25) must be enrolled in an accredited school as a full-time student. The term "Full-Time Student" means a participant's dependent child who is enrolled in and regularly attends a secondary school, college, or university, or a vocational/technical school in which completion of course work culminates in a licensed vocation. The educational institution must be accredited by the state where it is located and operate on a system of academic years or subdivisions of years, i.e., semesters or trimesters. The dependent child must attend for the minimum number of credit hours required by that secondary school, college, university, or vocational/technical school in order to maintain full-time student status.

If your dependent child will be graduating from college or is not enrolled in school for the fall semester, please remove the child from insurance by completing the Insurance Change Form located on the Front Page of Lotus Notes, under Forms and sending it to Human Resources. If your child will be graduating, the effective date should be the date of graduation. If your child is not choosing to continue classes, the effective date should be the date of the last class attended.

If your child is currently enrolled in Fall classes but at a later date chooses not to attend, you will need to remove the child from insurance. The effective date will be the date of the last class the child attended.

The above are the current rules of eligibility. If changes are made due to Health Care Reform we will educate employees of those changes. If you have questions related to this or any other benefits topics please contact Human Resources at 738-4800. ◻

Congratulations to Gil Dykstra: Named Jenison's Distinguished Citizen of the Year by the Grandville-Jenison Chamber of Commerce

While not an employee, Gil Dykstra has been a friend and supporter of Ottawa County. Gil has been volunteering at WCET-TV for over 17 years and has been an announcer for local sporting events and parades. Gil is best known for his two hour long program *The Georgetown Journal*. Through "The Journal," Gil has been a strong advocate for local government and community agencies. Those who know Gil appreciate his ability to make people smile with one of his jokes or puns. He not only volunteers at WCET-TV, but also visits the jail and spreads God's word to the inmates. The community is fortunate to have a willing and giving volunteer like Gil Dykstra. His efforts have made a very positive difference in throughout the entire county. ◻

ZUCCHINI CARROT CASSEROLE

- 2 pounds sliced zucchini
- ¼ cup chopped green onion
- 1 can (10 ½ oz) cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1 pkg. (8 oz) herb or chicken flavored stuffing mix
- ½ cup butter or margarine

In medium sauce pan, boil zucchini and onion for 5 minutes. Drain. In large bowl, mix soup, sour cream and carrots. Fold in drained zucchini. Melt margarine/butter and stir in stuffing mix. Spread half of the stuffing mix in bottom of a 12x7 or 12x9 inch baking dish. Spoon vegetable mixture on top. Sprinkle remaining stuffing mix over vegetable mixture. Bake at 350° F for 25-35 minutes. ◻



Administrator's Corner

Understanding Credit Ratings

In my travels around the County to brown bag lunches and other activities I will occasionally field a question about credit ratings or hear an occasional comment that the County seems to focus a lot, maybe too much, on credit ratings.

Credit ratings are an integral part of the public borrowing – debt issuance process. Homeowners finance home purchases with a borrowing instrument called a mortgage. Local governments in Michigan cannot legally borrow money from a bank or through a mortgage instrument. When local governments borrow money for major capital improvements they sell bonds to finance the debt. Typically large public building

projects and water/sewer plant and distribution system improvements and expansions are financed with bonds. The decision to issue debt is a major decision and is based on many factors such as the size of the project, available cash reserves set aside for projects, current interest earnings versus projected bond interest rates and projected cash flow needs for future operations. Bonding also provides an equitable way to spread the cost for a facility to the actual users of the facility into the future. It is often desired to pay as we go with cash reserves and not incur debt. The negative side of this approach is that the current and prior taxpayers are shouldering the entire burden of the project cost and sometimes debt is a better way to manage cash depending on current interest rates at the time bonds are sold. By bonding, the cost is paid by current and future taxpayers who benefit from the facilities and not just current taxpayers.

One of the reasons that county officials focus on credit ratings and consider them a source of significant concern is that credit ratings affect the degree of investor interest in purchasing a county's bonds and therefore the overall cost of a project overtime which in turn affects available cash flow for operations. There are three agencies that issue credit ratings for local governments: Moody's Investors Service; Fitch Ratings; and Standard & Poor's. The main purpose of the rating is to give investors an assessment of the financial health and future stability of the entity selling bonds. The credit rating is considered by many to be the top indicator of a county's financial health to the outside world.

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The three rating agencies assign credit analysts to each local government that is rated across the country. These analysts become experts on the management, financial condition, and local, regional and state economy of local governments that they are assigned to. Each time the government prepares to sell bonds they are interviewed by the credit rating analyst and sometimes others from the agency. These interviews can take place in New York, Chicago, at the local government selling the debt or by phone. June Hagan and I participate in the phone interviews and we did visit Chicago a few years ago with a larger team. The interviews are intense as the credit rating analysts ask tough questions and seem to know as much about the County and our internal and external circumstances as we do. The rating agencies then go to committee after the interviews and then release the rating within two-three days after the interview and shortly before the debt is issued.

Ottawa County has the top rating from Fitch Ratings, AAA; the top rating from Moody's, Aaa, and the second highest rating from Standard & Poor's, AA. Our ultimate goal would be to have the highest rating from all three agencies which is expressed as a Triple-Triple. Oakland and Kent counties have enjoyed Triple-Triple status for years now. Ottawa County's ratings have been excellent for a County of our size. We have been pleased to maintain our ratings in this terrible economy. Many governments have been downgraded and some upgraded depending on the particular policy of each rating agency. We were glad to finally be awarded Moody's highest rating in early May even though this was largely due to a global recalibration of all Moody's ratings and not because the County financial picture brightened. Regardless, it is always welcome to hold our own and not be downgraded as the State of Michigan and other local governments have.

The value of a high credit rating is readily apparent for our local units of government. As ratings go up, interest rates typically go down. Even though rates are expressed in 100ths of a percentage, many times this translates into significant savings when applied to a large project cost and repayment schedule. Townships are primary and frequent users of the County credit rating and a high county credit rating can save them real money in debt repayment cost. Cities sometimes use county ratings but in most cases obtain their own ratings. Other public agencies such as the North Ottawa Water Supply System have also used the County rating. The Board of Commissioners recently approved refunding bonds (paying off an outstanding current bond and reissuing debt for the unpaid balance) for Holland Township and will soon consider approving bonding for a City of Hudsonville water improvement project.

Credit ratings are not the end all of our financial efforts, nor do we place too much importance on them. Along with many other factors they are important tools for knowing and managing County finances to the best of our ability. ■