

Dickinson County Courthouse Newsletter 2012 in Review

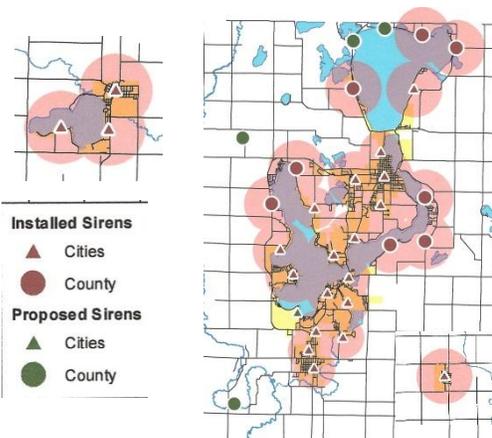
January 17, 2013



To start 2013, this newsletter is bringing you some highlights of 2012. The information has been provided by the Department Heads and/or their staff. Expect that future newsletters will probably be shorter. Read and enjoy at your leisure!

Emergency Management: Mike Ehret assisted the cities of West Okoboji and Superior with a grant for sirens. Both grant applications were successful and both sirens have been installed. With these two sirens, every town in the county now has outdoor warning sirens installed, a goal of Ehret's since he started in 2003. Once the applications are done, all cities along with the county will also be designated as *StormReady* by the National Weather Service. This should occur in 2013. As a side note the County has been installing one or two sirens a year and has 3 left to install (Marble Beach, Mini Wakan, & Horseshoe Bend).

See the map below for locations.



E-911: Voters approved increasing the landline surcharge from 75 cents to \$1 which will help to improve technologies in 911 and communications.

Auditor's Office: The Auditor's office handled a record breaking year with the General Election. Of the 12,578 registered voters in Dickinson County, 10,200 voted. Of those voters 4,428 voted absentee, which was also a record breaking number.

IT Department: The switch from Sidwell to Schneider this year was a big move for GIS. The new software adds layers at no additional fee and provides more information available to be shared with the public.

Veterans' Affairs: 2012 was the first complete year Ann Miller served as Director. She was also re-elected as Director for District Six of the Iowa County Commissioners, Directors and Administrators of Veterans Affairs. A new computer program was purchased by Veteran Affairs that is much more user friendly than the program it replaced. Being web based, it can be used in the field with ease and contains all the newest forms the VA requires. It has been a real asset both in the office and when filing claims in care facilities or for housebound clients.

On a sad note, the Veteran Affairs office did lose one of its commissioners, Mr. Robert Umscheid who passed away in October of 2012. He was a commissioner since 1985.

Clerk's office: The Clerk's office has had a busy year with a lot of it collections on fines. This also affects the offices of the County Attorney's office which does collections and payment plans and the Treasurer's office, which also does collections of fines by holding their driver's license tags. The office has lost 3 staff members to retirement, Deb Johnson in January 2012, Pam Bonstead in July 2012, and Kathleen Rimmer in December 2012. The Clerk was able to replace them with Teresa Eakin (Teresa was laid off about 3 years ago), Teresa Dalen from Estherville, Iowa, and Kay Wilson who is back after being gone from the office for 2 years. The Clerk's office is not back to full staff after the lay-offs, so all Clerks' offices are still closed Tuesday and Thursday's from 2:30-4:30 so they can get the paper work done. Starting January, 2013, the office is working on a new project called EDMS. This statewide project stands for "Electronic Document Management System". Marsha is hopeful it will be implemented in March if the training goes well. This means no more paper at all.

Secondary Road Department: After more than 35 years of service as a motor grader operator out of the Lake Park shop, Dan Stahly retired in October.

During the summer of 2012, Tri-State Paving performed a 3.5 inch Hot Mix Asphalt resurfacing project on 17 miles of County roads in the Southeast corner of the County. This \$3.2 million contract was the biggest road contract in the history of Dickinson County. The project contained a 3 mile stretch of Warm Mix Asphalt which is an evolving process in

which an additive is used as a means of binding the rock, sand and oil. This additive replaces the high temperature bonding that is normally required. As a result, significant high price fuel and resulting carbon emissions were eliminated. An open house in regard to this new technology was held in August and over 60 people attended.

Planning & Zoning: With the past depressed economy, the zoning office is pleased to inform that 2012 was a normal building year. The zoning office is looking forward to 2013 being even better.

After more than 15 years of looking for a solution, the town of Superior has completed a public sewer project. Superior's sewage is being piped to Estherville. Superior now has a public sewer and a public water system. Great needed improvements for the Town of Superior!

Cats and more cats!! There have been numerous cat complaints. These complaints are usually coming from neighbors of those who feed cats outside. Wild cats are attracted to the feeding area and then begin multiplying. These cats are not vet checked and not neutered or spayed. The goal is to control the wild cat population and have the cats be healthy and neutered or spayed

Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Greg Baloun said sadly that the most memorable thing about 2012 was that his office handled five drownings in one year. Here is hoping 2013 will be better!

Assessor's Office: The biggest change the Assessor's office has seen over the last year was an upgrade to the property tax computer software program. There were meetings and training in January/February. The office started using the program in March. Dickinson County was one of the first jurisdictions to implement this new version.

Recorder's Office: Sadly, on June 30th Jan Bortscheller resigned as County Recorder. Jan had worked for the County for more than 20 years and was midway into her 4 year term when she retired. Because of the timing of Jan's retirement, Iowa law required that the Auditor's office take on the responsibilities of the Recorder's duties until the next General Election. On November 6th Ann Ditsworth was elected as Recorder and was sworn in on November 14th to fill the remainder of Jan's term.

Mental Health: It has been an interesting year for Mental Health. The State passed Senate File 2315, which completely changed who, what, and how mental health services will be provided by Iowa counties. Beth and Sue have been trying to prepare for all the changes in services along with the financial impact of the new law. In addition to what services are to be provided by the county and how they will be financed, the law mandates the counties of Iowa form regions through 28E agreements. That process will be taking place in calendar year 2013 and has several mandated deadlines. The deadline for counties to voluntarily form regions through a letter of intent is April 1, 2013, with the regions in full operation by July 1, 2014. There is a tremendous amount of work and decisions to be done before full implementation in 2014. Additionally, the State has passed the law but has not settled on the funding so the financial ramifications are still up in the air. Dickinson, Clay, Emmet, Lyon, O'Brien, Osceola, and Palo Alto Counties are discussing the formation of a region.

County Attorney's Office:



The Dickinson County Attorney's office has a new County Attorney. On Sept. 2, 2012, Jason Carlstrom resigned as Dickinson County Attorney to take a position appointed by Governor Branstad. On July 10th, after reviewing several applications and receiving the recommendation of the interview committee, Jon Martin was appointed by the Board of Supervisor's to fill the position of Dickinson County Attorney.



Treasurer's Office: The Treasurer's biggest challenge last year was learning new software programs. The office went live on March 5, 2012 with the county's new property tax software, Tyler Tech's Version X. This was especially hectic because the office was also busy collecting taxes in March so had to learn fast and furiously. They also went live with a new online payment website in June (IowaTaxandTags.gov) for motor vehicle tags and in late August for taxes. The tax payment website is still being fine-tuned and should be completed by March

2013. On top of all this, the Treasurer's office also converted to new credit/debit card programs, and the Iowa Department of Transportation began having them do license plate replacements in April 2012. Plates that are 10 years or older are being replaced as the renewals come due. This has added more work in the office handling plates and learning the new software involved with the plate replacement, but the process has gone very smoothly. In 2013, REAL ID issuance will begin in the driver's license station, involving learning new procedures and programs in this department. The office is always learning new ways to do business!

With everything going on, the Treasurer's office took some time to decorate and enjoy the holidays and was the overall winner of the Wellness Holiday decoration contest. They became the recipients of the Traveling Tree.



Employee Spotlight! Let's get to know our County employees better!



Find out more about this Dickinson County employee in the February issue. In the meantime, can you guess who this is?