

# Dickinson County Courthouse Newsletter

## June 15, 2013



### Employee Spotlight!

#### **Let's get to know our County employees!**

The May Newsletter featured the picture of the little girl to the left. She is Kris Rowley. Kris is the Dickinson County Treasurer.



The following is a little personal information supplied by Kris.

**Start date with Dickinson County:** I started with the county on September 4, 2001, right before 9/11, as the first victim witness coordinator for Dickinson County. I ran for county treasurer 5 years later and became county treasurer on January 1, 2007.

**Where born:** My parents were originally from NW Minnesota, but had moved to Cedar Rapids and that was where I was born and grew up.

**Places Lived:** I lived in Decorah, Iowa, while I attended Luther College. I met my husband Dave in 1979 while I finished up my bachelor's degree at Coe College. After marrying in 1981, we lived in Cedar Rapids until moving to Atlantic, Iowa, in December

of 1987, moving a live Christmas tree with us. We moved to Spirit Lake 8 years later on April 1, 1996, with our four children, young then - but young adults now.

**Hobbies, talents, special interests:** My hobbies are: walking my dog, a big golden retriever and checking out the trails; reading - just about anything, fiction, history, math, science; how-to books - old and new; music; cooking; writing whenever time opens up.

**Talents:** writing; researching, telling stories.

**Special interests:** Norwegian troll stories - researching, telling and collecting. Morel mushrooms. Animals. Family. Faith. Flowers. Traveling. Science.

**Favorite Travel Spots:** The Black Hills, Yellowstone, New York, New Zealand, and Hawaii. One of my daughters just moved to Lansing, MI, so we're just beginning to explore that state and what we've seen is beautiful.

**Favorite Food:** all things vegetable - the fresher the better; almost all things seafood, especially shellfish; peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

**Least Favorite Food:** I thought I liked all things seafood until I tried octopus cooked in its ink and that is now my all-time yuck food.

**If I were stuck on an island, I would bring (3 things):** If I was stranded on an island, I would want a net to catch fish; a fire source to make a fire; my husband Dave who usually carries a Swiss Army knife and is handy and can be entertaining.

**Something Few Know About Me:** Few people know I used to be a freelance writer. I sold essays to places like The Des Moines Register and Christian Science Monitor.

**Favorite thing to do in Dickinson County:** My Favorite thing to do in Dickinson County is walk the trails. I love to walk in nature - I was a biology major. Nothing beats exercise in fresh air - rain, snow or sunshine.

### Emergency Management Office:

#### ***Information on the 6-4-13 Outage by Mike Ehret – what happened, what was done and what to do in the case of an emergency:***

Around 9:30am, Mike was on the phone calling Ohio when the call was suddenly dropped and he got a fast-busy signal. Shortly after that, the dispatcher contacted him to let Mike know that her 911 lines all rang at the same time, but there was no caller or data with the calls. This happens when there's a line cut - all the County 911 lines ring at once. At that point Mike realized there was a big issue and had Emmet County call the 911-repair center for Century Link for Dickinson County (he couldn't call himself, lines were down!). They verified there was an "issue" but were also working to determine the extent of it.

Determining the span of the outage

The first thing we do is start making phone calls to other communities to find out who can call who. Each cut is different. In this case, each community was isolated - meaning they could only call within their own telephone exchange (what used to be referred to as the 336-exchange, however with number portability, this is no longer the case). No calls could be made from exchange to exchange and long distance was down as well. We called two neighboring counties via radio and their systems were fine. Another issue is that we have Mediacom as a phone provider in the

area. In the case of this cut, Century Link (formerly Qwest) customers couldn't call Mediacom customers, adding another level of complexity to the problem.

Setting up call sites

As we've done in past situations, we setup locations within each exchange where people could call if they have an emergency. Spirit Lake & Orleans could call the communications center non-emergency number (336-2525), Arnolds Park & Okoboji called AP City Hall, Lake Park called Lake Park City Hall and Wahpeton, West Okoboji and Milford called the Milford Fire Station. We pick places that are well known, people can find, and have radio communications back to dispatch.

In the case of Terril and Superior, they're operated by separate telephone companies. They were able to both call Estherville, so those residents were instructed to call the Emmet County Law Enforcement Center (LEC). Also, all of our 911 calls were rerouted to Estherville during this time, so if someone was able to make a call out on 911, it would get sent to them. Emmet County would then relay any calls to us via radio or teletype.

Public Information

Once we had the numbers and locations setup, we notified KUOO of the issue and asked them to broadcast the information, which they continued to do throughout the day. The information was also sent to the National Weather Service in Sioux Falls who issued a 911 Telephone Outage Emergency (TOE) message. This message caused weather radios to alarm and then played the information, including numbers for people to call. This message continued for the duration of the outage. It was reissued three more times, causing the radios to alarm three more times as well. We also issued an alert via our Nixle system that reached around 260 people via e-mail and text message.

A new method we had for information dissemination this time was the DCEM Facebook page. The same information given to the NWS and local media was sent out via Facebook with the request that people share the message. The initial post was shared 54 times and seen by 4,986 people. We issued subsequent posts throughout the outage to keep people updated. (A side note, I've had very good success with my Facebook page for the EM office. I have 772 followers (compare that with 1,547 for Polk County - a county 26 times bigger than us in population, but with only two times as many followers on their EM Facebook page!) and will continue to utilize it in every way possible.

Waiting

Once the information was all sent out, we just had to wait for the repair to be made. There were no emergencies during the time of the outage, but we did receive a few calls from Emmet County and our call sites -- these were for minor calls where an officer needed to respond.

The actual cut occurred along Highway 86 by Okoboji View Golf Course. I'm not sure what actually happened, but it's likely one of three things: An excavator was digging without the utilities being marked, the utilities were improperly marked, or the locate was requested but not done. The phone company, the company they contract with to do their locates and the contractor on the project will have to battle it out to see who's at fault.

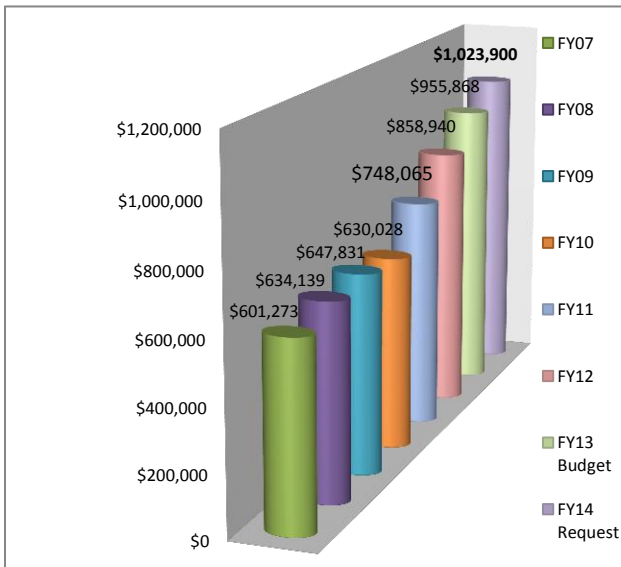
Repair Made

After being told the repair wouldn't be done until between midnight and 2am, we were given the all-clear by Century Link around 9pm Tuesday. The people who manned our call sites were released and the 911 calls were sent back to us.

What should the public do

If there's a phone outage like this, the public needs to monitor the local media for information - that's our primary method for information dissemination. Secondly would be the weather radios and social media sites. Folks should also sign up for our Nixle program. They'll receive alerts from us via e-mail and text message ([www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com)). In an emergency, they can try to call 911. If the call is successful, it may go to a neighboring county, as was the case Tuesday. Just give the dispatcher all the information they request, and they will radio the information back to us. If 911 doesn't work, try the alternate numbers that are provided. If you have no phone service at all and/or can't place a call, you will have to leave and go to the designated location for your city - in Tuesday's case, generally a city hall or fire station.

## Health Insurance Costs and the Wellness Programs:



From the chart to the left, you can see how Dickinson County costs for insurance have increased over the years. These are costs the taxpayers are taxed for and do not include any costs paid by County employees. Over the past 3 years, Dickinson County has had opportunities to reduce these increases in cost by participating in Wellness programs approved by the County health insurance provider.

The Wellness program that just ended asked that County insured employees complete a preventative exam and fill out the online incentive form for that exam.

With this program, for the County to receive a 2% reduction in insurance rates or a savings of \$20,478, the County needed 40% participation. A participation of 65% would have calculated to a \$40,956 savings to the County and ultimately to the taxpayers. *County participation was 34%. No savings.*

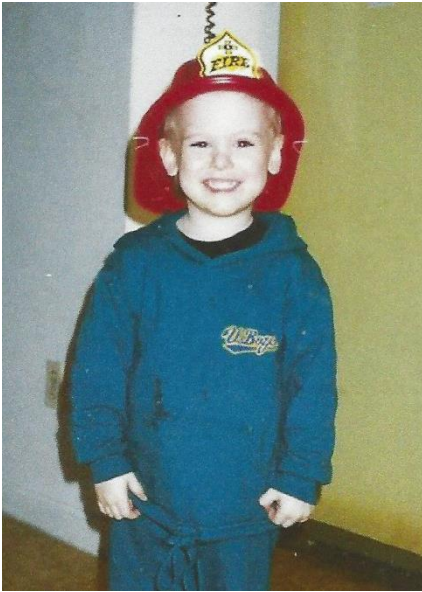
For the new Wellness July – November Program:

The Wellness Committee will offer two programs. County insured Employees need to participate in at least one program to be counted toward the insurance discount. Reductions are as follows:

- 50% participation – 2% rate reduction
- 60% participation - 3% rate reduction
- 75% participation – 4% rate reduction
- 90% participation – 5% rate reduction

The Wellness Walk is one of the current programs. It is ongoing from May – September. Employees who did not sign up at the beginning can participate from July – Sept. and that will count toward completing one program. If you have not signed up for the Walk Program and are interested in participating from July –September, information will be coming soon or you can call Barb Woodley now and sign up. The second program offering is tentatively planned for October.

## Employee Spotlight!



**Let's get to know our County employees!**

Find out more about this Dickinson County employee in the July issue.

In the meantime, can you guess who this is?