

Reedburg therapy business expands to new location

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REEDSBURG — A specialized counseling service has a new location in Reedburg.

Therapy without Walls opened at 2155 E. Main St. this summer after being in business for six years at a downtown location. Owner and Clinical Supervisor Greg Gintz said he still has the office downtown but needed to expand to accommodate more clients and staff.

Reedburg company Friede and Associates oversaw the project, which involved converting the old Bargain Barn into a modern facility with spacious meeting areas, art spaces, a meditation room, a play spot, offices, storage and a therapeutic garden. Gintz said services take place at the building, in people's homes or at public recreational places such as parks and water.

It's all part of the business model, which asks counselors and staff to work with clients where they are most receptive to assistance. Gintz said the goal is to make it fun, refreshing and fulfilling for everyone, especially adolescents who may be intimidated by offices. Therapy without Walls started by serving children and has expanded to include adults. Conditions addressed include depression, anxiety, grief, age-related issues and cognitive behavioral challenges. It also focuses on mindfulness and meditation.

Gintz said he started out small



HEATHER STANEK PHOTOS, TIMES-PRESS

Dominick Gintz folds donations for the Clothes Closet July 18 at Therapy without Walls.

with the office downtown but now has 31 employees serving 11 counties, including Sauk, Columbia, Juneau, Richland and Dane. Since sessions can be done out of the office, Therapy without Walls can reach people beyond Reedburg.

"It's amazing the impact you can have," he said.

Therapeutic mentor Anneliese Vandre said the new site has been empowering.

"I love the meditation room and the play therapy room and so do my clients," she said.

Vandre has been with Therapy without Walls since 2015 and called it an "upbeat" place to

work. She said it's an energetic, hopeful atmosphere thanks to the nontraditional format of counseling. Activities like walking, hiking, kayaking and horseback riding not only break down barriers but also give clients a healthy dose of vitamin D from the sun.

Therapy without Walls is also committed to community assistance, she added. It's starting a Clothes Closet where people can find gently used or new clothing or household goods.

Follow Heather Stanek on Twitter @HStaneke1 or reach her at 608-697-6353.

Committee to consider new highway commissioner

TIM DAMOS
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An oversight panel may recommend a new Sauk County highway commissioner today.

The Sauk County Board's Highway and Parks Committee is scheduled to discuss the matter after a closed session to consider final candidates.

It was not clear Monday who was under consideration for the position. Sauk County Personnel Director Michelle Posewitz did not return repeated messages beginning Aug. 1 seeking the resumes of final candidates.

The new hire would replace 25-year Highway Commissioner Steve Muchow, whose April retirement decision ended a personnel investigation into employee allegations against him.

Sauk County Sheriff Chip Meister determined in June that no law enforcement probe into the allegations was necessary. Meister is slated to meet with his

If you go

What: Sauk County Highway and Parks Committee meeting

When: Today, 9 a.m.

Where: Room 213, West Square Building, 505 Broadway, Baraboo

If you go

What: Sauk County Law Enforcement Committee meeting

When: Today, 4:15 p.m.

Where: Room D102A, Sauk County Law Enforcement Center, 1300 Lange Court, Baraboo

oversight committee this afternoon.

Follow Tim Damos on Twitter @timdamos

Probe

From A1

windows of his vehicle and drove off.

La Crosse attorney Jim Kroner, who has practiced law since 1979 and has expertise in criminal cases, said law enforcement officials should "err on the side of recusal" in matters that involve public employees within their governmental orbit.

The proper procedure often is to forward the matter to an outside agency for consideration, Kroner said, especially if the official has a personal relationship with the accused.

"People who know each other well enough to meet for a regularly scheduled monthly meal and socializing among friends should not be making recommendations about whether to investigate or prosecute each other for criminal activity," Kroner said. "It creates the appearance — if not the reality — of impropriety."

If the person accused of wrongdoing is exonerated by a friend, Kroner said, the public is left to wonder whether they escaped accountability. And that leaves both individuals under suspicion.

Mauston attorney Daniel Berkos, a former prosecutor and current chair of the Wisconsin State Public Defender Board, said sheriffs "almost always" refer criminal allegations against fellow county officials to outside agencies.

"It is possible that an outside agency could come to the same conclusion, but it eliminates any appearance of impropriety," Berkos said, adding that he believes Meister should not have made an investigatory decision regarding the highway commissioner.

Attorneys: Probe is warranted

In April, county administrative officials opened a personnel investigation into allegations against Muchow.

Highway department staff alleged he misrepresented financial information, manipulated bids, used county resources for personal reasons, misused county business relationships, falsified timecards and mistreated employees.

The 25-year highway commissioner gave notice in late April that he would retire, prompting officials to drop the personnel probe. Muchow has denied any wrongdoing.

On June 12, Sauk County Administrative Coordinator Alene Kleczek Bolin asked the sheriff to review the allegations for potential criminality. And four days later, Meister had concluded there should be no law enforcement investigation.

Meister focused on allegations outlined in a report prepared by a private accountant that the county hired as part of its personnel investigation. In a letter to Kleczek Bolin, he said only two allegations — both which involved employee timekeeping manipulation — constituted potential criminal behavior.

The sheriff determined that evidence gathered during the incomplete personnel investigation was not enough to substantiate the claims, so a law enforcement investigation was unnecessary.

The *Baraboo News Republic*

Only online

To read Sauk County Sheriff Chip Meister's letter regarding a possible criminal investigation into former Highway Commissioner Steve Muchow, go to baraboonewsrepublic.com

asked Berkos and Kroner, the two out-of-county attorneys, to review the accountant's report as well. Both disagreed with the sheriff's determination, and said they saw multiple allegations worthy of a criminal probe.

"That report suggests possible violations of the Wisconsin statute prohibiting misconduct in public office that are worthy of further investigation," Kroner said. "The behavior may or may not be criminal, but warrants further investigation."

Kroner said employee claims that Muchow manipulated information to get around financial policies and used county material for personal reasons are particularly worthy of review by law enforcement.

He also pointed to information in the report that alleges Muchow did not pay sales tax on personal purchases made under the guise of highway department business.

"If that allegation is true, it's clear to me that sales tax is owed," Kroner said. "Whether or not that means a crime has been committed, I don't know."

Berkos said he also saw possible violations of the state's misconduct in public office statute. And he questioned portions of the sheriff's letter in which he said the county would need to audit billings and review past policies to prove allegations.

"That is exactly what investigations do," Berkos said. "What he is saying is that he is not going to look beyond the face of the complaint to find facts that either support or debunk the claims."

Sheriff defends decision

In an email Thursday — less than 24 hours before he met with Muchow for breakfast — the sheriff defended his decision. He said most of the allegations against the former highway commissioner represented possible ethical or personnel infractions, but were not criminal.

Meister said he and his chief deputy reviewed documents separately, and both reached the same conclusion. They would have asked for an outside review of the matter if they believed the criminal allegations could be substantiated, Meister said, "but other law enforcement agencies are not going to investigate policy violations or poor management practices."

Sauk County District Attorney Kevin Calkins said none of the allegations contained within that accountant's report had been referred to his office. And he would not comment on whether he saw any potential criminality.

"I would need to see full investigative reports before coming to any conclusion," Calkins said in an email.

If the sheriff and the district attorney are not willing to pursue the matter, it could be taken up by the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

"Anyone can contact DOJ and ask them to investigate," Berkos said. "I think (the accountant's) report gives them plenty to go on."

Follow Tim Damos on Twitter @timdamos

State farmer awarded millions over stray voltage

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GALESVILLE — A western Wisconsin farmer could be awarded up to \$13.5 million after winning a five-year legal battle against an electric services company over stray voltage.

Paul Halderson told the La Crosse Tribune that his dairy farm herd of nearly 1,000 cows dealt with illness and decreased milk production for more than a decade because of Xcel Energy's improperly grounded power lines.

Current that leaks from neutral wires in the ground are referred to as stray voltage. Research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture

has found that it can cause cattle to avoid eating, become stressed and produce less milk.

The lawsuit said Northern States Power Company, a subsidiary of Xcel Energy, found excessive voltage in one of Halderson's barns in 1996 but failed to report it. Halderson hired a consultant in 2011 and found that the high levels of electricity were coming from the utility's distribution system.

Xcel Energy installed equipment to reduce stray voltage in 2011.

"It's like night and day," Halderson said in a statement re-

leased by his attorney. "When we had stray voltage, we could never get the production we wanted and the cows were struggling with health problems. Now it seems effortless. Production is way up and the cows are doing great."

The utility said it didn't detect harmful currents where the cows were located and that the farm's dairy production issues were a result of difficulties in the dairy industry such as bad feed, disease and inadequate veterinary care.

A Trempealeau County jury awarded Halderson about \$4.5 million, but the court may triple that amount.

Foxconn

From A1

where innovation happens. We are leading in mobility and the transformation of manufacturing, and the rest of the world is clearly taking note. I believe we have a strong future with Foxconn, and while I don't have an announcement to make today, I think there are very exciting things to come in the future."

Foxconn officials have visited Michigan at least three times and have looked at sites in Romulus, a southwestern Detroit suburb, and Lyon Township, an suburb on the metro area's western edge.

Two weeks ago Snyder signed a package of bills that would provide significant tax incentives for companies like Foxconn. The lure of the huge investment from the foreign manufacturer was one of the primary selling points for the Legislature to approve the bills last month.

The bills would:

- Allow businesses that expand or relocate to Michigan to receive up to a 10-year, 100 percent abatement on the personal income-tax withholdings of new employees if at least 250 new jobs are brought to the state, at wage rates that are at least 125 percent above the average for the region.

- Make the incentive a five-year, 50 percent abatement on those withholdings for companies that bring in at least 500 jobs that pay the average wage for the region.

- Allow companies that bring up to 3,000 jobs to the state at average wages in the region to qualify for the 100 percent incentive for up to 10 years.

- Require that eligible companies make a good-faith effort to hire Michiganders for the new jobs in the state.

- Prohibit eligible companies from using jobs obtained through a merger or acquisition of another company as a qualifier for the incentive.

- End incentives in 2019 and lower the maximum amount of

tax incentives at any one time to \$200 million.

Foxconn's announcement about the investment in Wisconsin came on the same day that Snyder signed the bills. In Wisconsin, the \$10 billion Foxconn investment comes at a big price. If approved by the state Legislature, Wisconsin will kick in \$3 billion in tax incentives for the company.

Foxconn chose Wisconsin over a number of other states offering the company a larger incentive package, Gov. Scott Walker said last week.

Officials have said the plant in Wisconsin is expected to create 3,000 manufacturing jobs, 23,000 indirect jobs and 10,000 construction jobs to build the sprawling Foxconn campus in Kenosha or Racine counties. The full-time workforce could grow to 13,000, with an annual payroll of some \$800 million, state officials have said.

Wisconsin State Journal staff contributed to this report.

Bypass

From A1

lanes on the new road and the old U.S. 12 as work continues. "It's going to be a big switch," Brecka said. "We want to let everybody know."

After the bypass opens, it'll take another four to six weeks to finish the project, with wrap-up work

such as landscaping, removing a roundabout in West Baraboo and reconnecting Sauk County Highway BD to its original alignment. Construction will be staged to accommodate traffic. Brecka estimated work will conclude in mid-September.

The DOT plans to rebuild what is now known as Highway 12 next year. The stretch of road to be re-

paired and resurfaced runs from Terrytown Road south to Highway 159. The project will include curbs and gutters, storm sewer inlets, deck resurfacing and railing replacement on the bridge over the Baraboo River, as well as the reconstruction of an intersection at 159.

Follow Ben Bromley on Twitter @ben_bromley

Extension

From A1

In discussing the possibility of sharing Extension positions with other counties, Hoffman said, there are two key considerations: how much each participating county would have to contribute, and how the duties of a shared educator would be allocated and prioritized.

"The work," Hoffman told the committee Monday, "is the biggest discussion."

Hoffman said a key part of his

job, as area director, would be to advocate for Extension staffing in each of the three counties in his jurisdiction.

State Extension officials plan to give top priority to keeping Extension educators, such as Koeppe, who are already established. The second priority would be filling vacancies.

But the bottom line, Hoffman said, is that counties will likely not have the same level of Extension service as they had before the state-imposed cut.

"To be blunt," Hoffman said, "they need to reduce the number

of bodies in Extension."

Members of the Columbia County Board's Agriculture and Extension and Land and Water Committee have tentatively scheduled a joint meeting with their counterpart committee from the Sauk County Board for 1 p.m. Aug. 28 at Columbia County's Administration Building, 112 E. Edgewater St., to talk about the finances and logistics of sharing the two Extension educator posts.

Follow Lyn Jerde on Twitter @LynJerde