

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

From
KATHLEEN M. FALK



DANE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Greetings! I hope that you had great summers and that the transition to fall is colorful and refreshing. It is, of course, the time when young people return to school and an appropriate time to talk a little about how Dane County works with kids who are at important crossroads in their lives. I'm talking about juvenile justice and the unique approaches that Dane County has developed over the years.

Our goal continues to be to catch kids before they freefall into a life punctuated by court orders, appearances and even prison time. Unlike other counties in this state and nation where new big juvenile jails are constructed to contain a problem, Dane County two decades ago chose a path of in-community programs to keep kids in the community, near family members and other mentors, to get them back on the right path to balanced, quality lives. That's why the population in the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center has

remained in the mid-teens for more than 20 years despite the fact that Dane County is such a fast growing county.

Dane County invests several million dollars each year to support our unique Neighborhood Intervention Program that emphasizes public safety, accountability and coping skills including intensive supervision for 90 kids. But also including after school youth resource centers, year-round tutoring, alternative middle schools, community service work and youth grants for very important programs. The continued investment and support of our programs and great staff and community partners have enabled us to work with and to support our troubled youth, protect the community and limit the number of secure and costly detentions in state facilities (which cost about \$75,000 per child per year). These are only a few examples of wise investments that Dane County makes in our young people while protecting public safety. I know that it's trite but profoundly true that children are our future. Thank you for all you do in your families and neighborhoods to support and encourage children in our community.

County Executive Falk can be reached at 266-4114 or falk@co.dane.wi.us

From
PAUL RUSK



DISTRICT 12 SUPERVISOR

Public Protection and Judiciary
My standing committee is now involved in many issues as we prepare for a difficult fall budget process. Fortunately the bids came in on budget for the new juvenile detention center in the remodeled City-County building. A new subcommittee will work to recommend a location for the new Huber Treatment Center that will include special needs beds for those with mental illnesses. None of us are looking forward to a difficult budget process. Program needs and what the public expects are growing at a time when available revenues are declining and energy costs are increasing. We'll prioritize and do the best that we can with a mandated state cap on expenditure increases.

Warner Park Advisory Committee Changes
I testified before the Parks Commission about proposed membership changes. As one of the Center's original community architects I'm dismayed that some wish to limit participation under the guise of efficiency, exactly when we need more creative

partnerships as government dollars shrink. The current membership plan takes away voting rights of three key community partners—the Northside Planning Council, the North/Eastside Senior Coalition, and Madison School Community Recreation. Obviously these groups play a critical role in the building and should be sought out for their expertise. A representative from one of the four Northside community centers was added, which is positive, but the Commission also, probably inadvertently, left off the two Northside alders and a member of the Parks Commission. I have written a long letter to the Mayor asking for the original city staff team made up of some of the city's most creative managers who worked so successfully on WPC to reconvene. The bottom line is vision. The Parks Commission is interested in recreation, but Community Services, the Block Grant Commission, Planning & Development and the original Northside partners are also concerned about an aging population, growing poverty and what makes all kids succeed.

Public/Private Partnership Team
Supervisor Dorothy Wheeler and I are forming a team to raise early money for the proposed Northside pool. Contact us if wish to walk with us on August 26!

Supv. Rusk can be reached at 249-9667 or rusk@co.dane.wi.us

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From
DOROTHY WHEELER



DISTRICT 18 SUPERVISOR

Youth Commission

The county executive appointed me to the Youth Commission this term, which pleases me very much since I spent many years teaching middle and high school students. Their well-being is a matter of the heart! In 2005 the Dane County Youth Assessment was given to all 7th and 12th graders in participating school districts. The results are being used to gather information about how students feel about school, either connected or disconnected, and to analyze what forces drive students' attitudes and achievement. With data showing that about 22% of the students surveyed harbor negative feelings about school, the Youth Commission will soon publish the key findings from this assessment along with their recommendations for improving the attitudes of these students. Another study analyzed the characteristics of youth involved with gangs; not surprisingly there was a high correlation with those youth feeling disconnected from school.

With a focus on prevention of negative and risky behaviors that often

result in harmful outcomes for young adults, Dane County developed a plan in 1997 to provide county funding to help communities and neighborhoods start afterschool youth centers. Since both parents work in over 65% of families in Dane County, many 11 to 14 year olds are unsupervised in the late afternoon. Youth Resource Centers provide a safe and welcoming environment for these youth. Supervising adults provide help with homework, give students an opportunity to develop personal skills and offer a chance just to "hang out" with friends. Sherman Middle School is one of 10 middle schools in Madison that has an active Youth Resource Center. Since private funders help county and local governments support youth centers, they are excellent examples of successful public/private partnerships.

Highway M

It was with some relief that I learned of the opening of Highway M. The first time I drove the new and improved Highway M, I was very impressed with the job accomplished by the county highway department. The road has widened shoulders, clearly delineated with white lines and turn lanes that cannot be missed by drivers! The result is a smoother, faster and safer drive to Middleton.

Supv. Wheeler can be reached at 244-4711 or djwheele@juno.com

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