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Administrator/HR Office**

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CARLTON COUNTY MINNESOTA

County-wide newsletter brought to you by the County Administrator's Office

Issue 03 October / November / December 2025

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Employee Service Awards

- Jessica Krone - PHHS
10 Years
- Karley Abrahamson - PHHS
10 Years
- Megan Alama - PHHS
10 Years
- Kristina Bailey - PHHS
10 Years
- Ryan O'Connor - Sheriff's Office
10 Years
- Tess Christensen - Community & Family Initiatives
10 Years
- Clint Horton - Transportation
20 Years
- Paul Coughlin - Sheriff's Office
30 Years

Edmundson Honored with MSSA Region 3 Exemplary Leadership Award

MSSA Region 3 Chapter is proud to announce that Lisa Edmundson been awarded the prestigious Exemplary Leadership Award. Edmundson has served Carlton County as a social worker since 2000, working across child protection, adult services, and treatment court. She demonstrates exemplary leadership through mentoring colleagues, building strong community partnerships, and providing compassionate, hands-on support to clients—often going above and beyond, even donating her own resources. Edmundson actively champions diversity, equity, and inclusion by participating in state-level task forces, legislative sessions, and peer support initiatives, while continuing to further her professional education. Additionally, she also serves on MSSA's Region 3 Board. Her lasting impact on clients, colleagues, and her organization is evident in the deep trust she builds, the lives she's helped transform, and her unwavering commitment to service over the past 25 years.

The award was presented at the Region 3 Legislative Listening Session, held on October 8 in Duluth, MN. MSSA's annual awards program celebrates outstanding professionals in the health and human services sector.



Erspamer Receives 2025 Local Public Health Association Emerging Leader Award



Joanne Erspamer received the 2025 Local Public Health Association Emerging Leader Award at the Partners in Public Health Conference held on October 28, 2025. This award recognizes emerging local public health leaders who go above and beyond to move public health forward. Joanne was recognized for her willingness to lead workgroups and projects that move forward foundational public health responsibilities, her advocacy for the mental health-focused work of local public health, her support for her team, her ability to bring people together, and her leadership within the region. Joanne's leadership, passion for public health, and numerous contributions exemplify the spirit of this award.

2026 Carlton County Board of Commissioners



Sarah Plante Buhs
Member
218.576.3989

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Sarah.PlanteBuhs@carltoncountymn.gov



Marv Bodie
Member
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218.348.4288

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Thomas.Proulx@carltoncountymn.gov



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218.380.2170

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Susan.Zmyslony@carltoncountymn.gov



Dan Reed
Vice-Chair Person
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Dan.Reed@carltoncountymn.gov

*Board meetings are held at the Transportation Building on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 8:30 a.m. and the 4th Monday of every month at 4:00 p.m.

Carlton County Assessor Receives Minnesota Assessor of the Year Award

Since 1949, the Minnesota Association of Assessing Officer (MAAO) mission has been to promote excellence in property appraisal and assessment administration through high-quality education, professional development, and ethical standards. MAAO (Minnesota Association of Assessing Officers) is 880+ members strong across the state and is comprised of members from all 87 counties and the Department of Revenue's property tax division.

MAAO is proud to support assessors across Minnesota by offering: comprehensive educational opportunities, online resources and the Equal Eyes publication, legislative monitoring and advocacy, networking and leadership development, mentorship programs and scholarships, member discounts, and more.

Each year the organization holds its annual conference in which new officers are installed, timely updates by the Minnesota Department of Revenue are given, and exceptional educational seminars are held, allowing members to work on fulfilling their continuing educational requirements for their licenses. Also, during this conference special awards and recognitions are often bestowed upon the worthy. Honors such as lifetime achievement awards, instructor of the year, longevity awards, etc. are issued by voting members and the Executive Board. This year, Kyle Holmes, Carlton County Assessor was presented with the MAAO's Assessor of the Year award,



highlighting his contributions to his county, the state, and the membership. Kyle was a past president of the organization, has been an Executive Board member for 15 years and currently sits as the state's Region 4 director on the board, is the conference coordinator for MAAO, is an occasional instructor, is a grader for the Minnesota State Board of Assessors, is a regional proctor for licensure exams in the state, and is a active mentor to new assessor's around the state. Kyle clearly demonstrates the ability, and desire to go above and beyond for the profession and his fellow assessor's and is clearly valued by the organization and it members for all he gives. Congratulations to Kyle Holmes, MAAO's 2025 Assessor of the Year!



L to R: Anoka County Assessor and Immediate Past President of MAAO, Cass County Assessor and Past President/Last MAAO Assessor of the Year Award winner, Carlton County Assessor and current MAAO Assessor of the Year Award winner

Carlton County Initial Response Unit Staff Collaborate as Multi-Disciplinary Team

In October, two Carlton County Initial Response Unit staff (Raija Haag and Thaddeus Wood) had the opportunity to present alongside the Carlton County Attorney's Office, Fond du Lac Human Services, the Carlton County Sheriff's Office, Cloquet Police Department, PAVSA, and First Witness at a Minnesota Child Welfare Training Academy Event focused on collaboration as a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). Carlton County was asked to present as an example of excellent MDT work, and the presentation was very well received. We have heard feedback from multiple teams that they plan to focus on engaging with their prosecutors, focus on building better processes with tribal nations, and work to collaborate with their law enforcement to come together to support children and families in their communities. Overall, the presentation was a tremendous success and great opportunity to share a process that works well here in Carlton County that could be positively implemented across the State of Minnesota.

Carlton County Receives MCIT Awards

MCIT Board Chair Ron Antony announced the recipient of MCIT's annual awards during the 2025 Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust Annual Membership Meeting December 8th in Bloomington. Every year MCIT recognizes three counties that excel at risk management and loss control.

Carlton County earned the Outstanding Performance in the Workers' Compensation Division award. The division awards are presented to counties that demonstrate consistent improvement in the areas during the assessment period. For workers' compensation, the award recognizes improvement in the county's experience modification factor and reduced claims in the areas of workplace injury and illness, as well as a commitment to reducing employee injuries and improving loss control efforts. On behalf of the MCIT Board, Antony congratulated the winners on their accomplishments.

MCIT also honored Carlton County with its first ever placement on the MCIT 2025 Property Casualty Honor Roll. A member must have a Property/Casualty loss ratio less than 50% for the previous 5 consecutive years to qualify as an honor roll member. Carlton was one of only 17 Minnesota counties to be named to the honor roll, due in significant part to the focused efforts of Shanny Hurst, Administrative Assistant to the County Administrator and Property Management Director. Ms. Hurst is responsible for coordinating loss reduction efforts between MCIT and county staff.



L to R: Past AMC President Mike Slavik, Commissioner Dan Reed, Commissioner Sarah Plante-Buhs, Commissioner Marv Bodie, HR Assistant Nitasha Makowsky, Commissioner Susan Zmyslony, Administrative Assistant Shanny Hurst, HR Director Gary Jackson, County Administrator Dennis Genereau, not pictures HR Generalist Dannell Savage-Ofanoa who was among those most responsible for the county's response to workplace safety and injuries.

Comp Plan Community Kick-Off A Success

Carlton County hosted a Community Kick-Off Event as part of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan process on December 4th at the Historic Courthouse. The public and the business community came out in frigid temperatures to learn about the planning process and shared thoughts on the key issues and opportunities shaping the County's future.

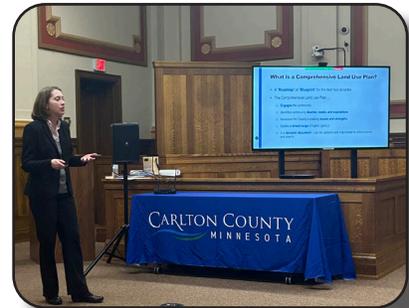
Throughout the day, staff from the County's Comprehensive Plan consultant, Houseal Lavigne, conducted meetings with several focus groups targeting topics such as agriculture, infrastructure, tourism, natural resources, and elder care. In addition, they met with Fond du Lac representatives, several community leaders, and area students. Important feedback was gathered and is being compiled into an Existing Conditions Memorandum to be shared with the County later this winter.

On December 3rd, Houseal Lavigne met with the County Commissioners and the Planning Commission, together making up the Advisory Committee for the Comprehensive Plan, and sought input on issues facing the County. Key issues mentioned included housing, high tax rates, economic development, job creation, and infrastructure. The consultant will return to the County for more in-person workshops in early 2026.

The Community-Based Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a blueprint for the future. It is a community vision that will guide the County for the next 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan will result in a set of policies that direct future

growth and development. Additionally, the creation of a Plan can lead to potential strategies that will help effectively guide Carlton County leaders as they make substantive and thoughtful decisions for the community. The initial phases of the Plan have begun with anticipated completion in the Fall of 2026.

You can get involved in all the Comprehensive Plan activities, from data collection to community visioning and mapping, to the creation of community goals and objectives. The [Comp Plan website](#) describes all the opportunities available to give your input, including public meetings, online surveys and questionnaires, and an interactive mapping tool.



Let's Get Acquainted With the Assistant Health Director for Public Health & Human Services



Hello everyone, I'm Joanne Erspamer, and recently shifted into the role as the Assistant Public Health Director for Public Health and Human Services. I am honored to serve in this role and share my passion for Public Health. For the past 22 years, I have been working in the Family and Community Public Health Unit – most recently as the Supervisor, and previously as a Health Educator. It is an exciting and dynamic experience to work with our community and team to improve population health outcomes. Our Public Health role is to prevent, promote, and protect the health of the population. Sometimes this comes with educating on, updating, or advocating for legislation; carrying out and enforcing laws; or monitoring the strategies/practices and corresponding data about the impacts of regulations. I have seen great collaborations between our team and the community, and we have made positive strides in improving health outcomes around reducing tobacco use and second hand smoke in public places; increasing safe opportunities for being physically active on our roads by partnering to create trails, bike lanes, sidewalks, and dedicated school routes, pedestrian paths and connections; and addressing and reducing opioid overdoses through the implementation of community naloxone or Narcan access, and other evidence informed approaches. These are only a few of the complex health issues, and many more which consume our time and energy.

I'm excited to grow and learn along with the PHHS team to advance Public Health by making greater internal connections with the Long Term Care Public Health team, and across the Human and Social Services units. As an Assistant Public Health Director, I look forward to working with our Director, Annie Napoli, the Assistant Social Services Director, Angie Hartwig, and the Administration team to partner in more strategic ways to advance the mission of PHHS and serve the community. As we face increasing health concerns and financial constraints, we can use this reorganization to collaborate and streamline our efforts together to assure that we are moving forward together to reduce the burdens in our community posing barriers to access to healthcare and services; improve access to basic needs like food and shelter; and build connections with community partners to create a networked system to support residents and their health outcomes.

In my time outside of work, I love traveling with my husband, Ryan, and 2 kids – Evan and Eliana, and sometimes with my 2 dogs (golden doodles – Shadow and Lolli). I enjoy being on my mountain bike or cross country skis; and in the Summer and Fall can be found “glamping” at the many XC MTB races in which I support my son and husband in, or on family getaways. My favorite thing to drive is my RV. I also spend time coaching the local High School Mountain Bike Club (6th-12th grade) and cannot express enough how inspired I am by these student athletes and the hard work they accomplish in this sport!

Let's Get Acquainted with the Social Services Assistant Director for Public Health & Human Services

My name is Angela Hartwig, and I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker with over thirteen years of experience in county social services. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from the University of Wisconsin–Superior and a Master's in Social Work from the University of Minnesota–Duluth. For the past three years, I've served as the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team Supervisor and Team Lead with Carlton County Social Services, where I've led a multidisciplinary team providing intensive, community-based support to individuals with serious and persistent mental illness. Prior to this role, I spent almost ten years with St. Louis County, where I worked extensively in waiver services, supporting individuals with diverse disabilities and complex needs.

Throughout my career, I've been committed to promoting person-centered care, staff development, and collaborative partnerships that strengthen outcomes for the people and communities we serve. I'm passionate about advancing equitable, effective systems of care — and I'm eager to bring that leadership and perspective to the Social Services Assistant Director role.

I started my professional journey here at Carlton County Public Health and Human Services as a bachelors and later a masters level intern. I am excited to be back and to have a new opportunity to serve this community. Outside of work I enjoy spending my time with my husband and our two children . I enjoy gardening , camping, and reading throughout the summer and snowmobiling, and snowshoeing in the winter. I also enjoy traveling or planning my next trip.



Veteran's Corner - Did You Know

VA offers construction loans for Veterans to build their dream homes

Having a house built is an excellent way to obtain your dream home. Building your own home could also be a solution in areas where there is a low inventory market. While most construction projects can be complex, it's a great benefit for those Veterans willing to invest the necessary time, energy and funds to ensure the project's success. Just like a traditional VA home loan where the Veteran purchases a pre-existing or newly built property, there may be no down payment, no private mortgage insurance requirement, and depending on your VA disability rating, you may be exempt from the VA funding fee.

A construction loan is structured differently from a traditional mortgage, and it comes with stricter qualifications and greater documentation. One of the first steps is to find a participating VA lender who offers a construction loan product. Once you've chosen a lender, you'll need to provide proof of income, reserves, assets and debts along with a complete credit check. There are numerous construction loan calculators that can help provide estimates, but it's best to work with your lending professional to determine how much you can afford.

Having a home built to your specifications requires architectural plans and hiring the right contractor to do the work. Veterans should conduct a thorough search and utilize trusted sources when choosing a builder. A good place to start is your local home builders' association that maintains a list of builders who construct homes in your area and meet state and/or local licensing requirements. Construction loans require a good amount of pre-planning and paying out of pocket expenses before purchasing the land. You'll want to do proper due diligence with the local building authority to ensure all necessary permits can be obtained.

Once approved, construction can begin with initial proceeds disbursed into an escrow account. The money in this escrow "draw account" pays the builder at certain points during construction. Your lender must obtain your written approval before each disbursement or draw payment is provided to the builder. Choose your new home builder wisely. The best ones take charge and communicate well. Check references, read reviews and look at their past building projects. Don't be afraid to ask questions and compare builders just the same as you'd do to choose a lender.

Today, most construction projects can take a year or more to complete. It's important to understand factors that are outside your control and may potentially extend or delay the timeline of your construction project that can drive-up costs. Unforeseen circumstances like weather, lumber costs, labor shortages or plan changes can throw a construction project off track. Although the loan will normally be considered guaranteed upon closing, the guaranty on a construction home loan will not be issued until a clear final compliance inspection report has been received by VA.

VA is always working hard to improve the well-being for our Nation's Veterans, and VA home loans are a great opportunity for those wanting to build their "forever" home.

For more information about the specifics of the VA construction loan process and requirements, please see the VA Buyer's Guide (PDF, 52 pages, 925KB).

Public Health In Action

December usually comes with a rush to meet end-of-the-year deadlines, a flurry of holiday shopping and festivities, and even a few flurries in the air. We all want to keep our families healthy and able to participate in the gatherings and activities the season brings. But this December has been unusually busy for those who work in public health to prevent illness, for several reasons.

First, it appears that our annual cold & flu season has taken off like a rocket this year! Our unofficial start to this season is around the beginning of October; just enough time for kids to settle back into the school year and for most of us to move towards indoor activities.

By late November, we saw temps drop and winter-weather arrive just in time for Thanksgiving. Possibly as a result of those holiday gatherings, Minnesota is seeing an increase in early December positive lab tests and hospitalizations for the "big 3" respiratory viruses: Influenza, COVID-19 and RSV1. These diseases disproportionately hit the very young (0-4 years) and older (65+) age groups, causing the majority of hospitalizations. These respiratory viruses can continue to circulate at higher numbers well into March or April, and the best way to prevent serious illness is with your annual flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. It's not too late!

The flu vaccine helps protect against severe disease for 3 different strains and could provide some cross-protection for strains that aren't included in the flu vaccine. This year's COVID-19 vaccine also helps protect against circulating strains. One dose of RSV vaccine² is recommended for all adults ages 75 or older, adults ages 50-74 at increased risk for severe RSV disease, and pregnant women between 32-37 weeks gestation. There is also a special RSV prevention shot for infants entering their first RSV season. Contact your local clinic or pharmacy to



cough or sneeze into
your upper sleeve,
not your hands.

Continued on next page

Carlton County Committee's

Arts and Interior Finishes (Historic Courthouse)

Building Committee -
Monthly - 2nd Wednesday at 1:00 p.m.
(Government Services Building -GSB)

Committee of the Whole -
Monthly - 1st Tuesday at 4:00 p.m.
(TB)

Diversity Committee -
Monthly - 4th Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.
(PH&HS)

Finance Committee -
Monthly - 1st Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.
(TB)

IT Committee -
Monthly - 3rd Wednesday at 8:30 a.m.
(GSB)

Management Team -
Monthly - 1st Tuesday at 8:30 a.m.
(GSB)

Personnel Committee
Monthly - 3rd Tuesday at 2:00 p.m.
(GSB)

Safety Committee
Quarterly
(PHHS)

Wellness Committee -
Monthly - 2nd Wednesday at 8:30 a.m.
(Varies)

CARLTON COUNTY
MINNESOTA

Are you interested in submitting an article in the next Carlton County Newsletter? Email or mail your articles and pictures by the March 20, 2026 deadline to:

Shanny Hurst
Carlton County Administrator's Office
1307 Cloquet Avenue, Suite #1
Cloquet, MN 55720
shanny.hurst@carltoncountymn.gov

*Please note that all submissions are subject to editing, as needed.

Public Health In Action Continued

schedule a vaccine appointment. Also, it's best to stay home and away from others if you're feeling sick (fever, chills, new onset of a cough, extreme fatigue, etc.) and wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water or use a hand sanitizer if hand washing is not an option.

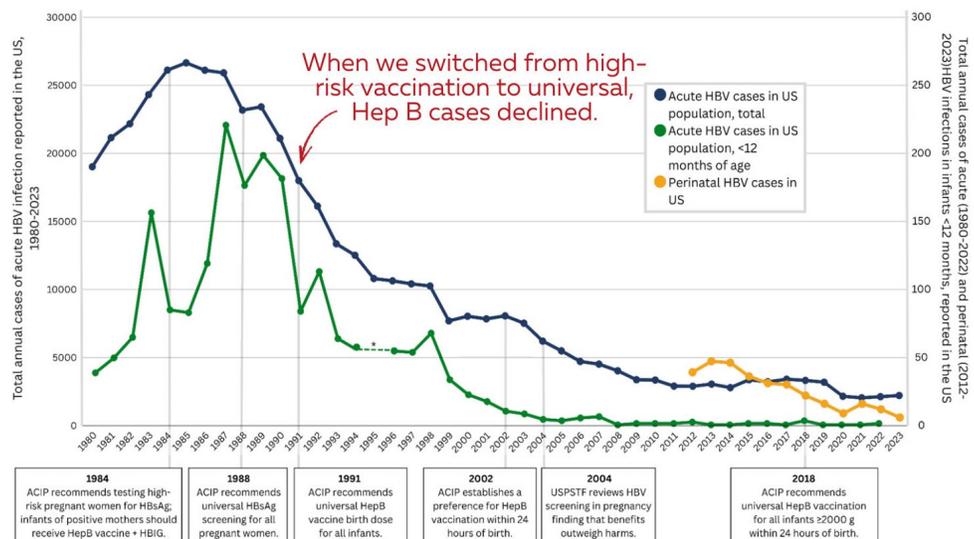
On December 5, 2025, the ACIP voted 8-3 to recommend that every baby whose mother tests positive for hepatitis B receive the vaccination, and that all parents talk to their child's doctor about whether to give the hepatitis B vaccine to infants, even if the mother tests negative. The vaccine is safe, effective at preventing infection, and provides a lifetime of protection. The hepatitis B vaccine will continue to be covered under health insurance plans and the Vaccines for Children programs. The Hep B birth-dose vaccine is already administered with parental consent in the US. This move away from recommending it universally may lead to more challenges in access to the Hep B vaccine and other vaccines in the future. Delaying the administration of the vaccine, even by two months, could lead to an increase in infections and even deaths from hepatitis B.

For historical context, the US has been recommending a universal Hep B vaccine dose since the early 1990's for several reasons. 1) Babies are especially vulnerable to contracting Hep B if exposed with about a 90% infection rate. 2) Between 12-18% of US pregnant women are never tested for hepatitis B and only about 35% of women who test positive get recommended care. 3) The birth dose is highly effective at preventing hepatitis B infection and studies have shown it is safe. 4) Hep B infections started to decline in the US when universal birth dose was recommended, showing the vaccine was working.

On December 11, 2025, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) endorsed "the evidence-based guidance of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) that supports the administration of a birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine for all infants [...] because the [ACIP] recommendation is not based on science"⁴.

One of the cornerstones of public health is to prevent, which means "to keep something from happening or arising" (Oxford Languages definition). Vaccines work to prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and even death. They introduce your immune system to a weakened or dead particle from a bacteria or virus, teaching your body to build up the antibodies needed to resist and manage the disease on its own if you're ever exposed to it in the future. Stay tuned to more updates from the Minnesota Department of Health and Carlton County Public Health & Human Services.

1. MDH: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/respiratory/stats/index.html>
2. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/rsv/vaccines/index.html>
3. Your Local Epidemiologist: https://yourlocalepidemiologist.substack.com/p/what-to-expect-from-this-weeks-us?r=172ywy&utm_medium=ios&triedRedirect=true
4. MDH: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNMDH/bulletins/3ff6f6e>



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