

# Pine Knot

## News

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## Officer loses job, cases dismissed

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Following a closed Cloquet City Council meeting Tuesday, a Cloquet police officer will no longer work for the department, and scores of cases he worked on are being reviewed and at least 18 have been dismissed. In at least one case, charges were dismissed after the defendant pleaded guilty.

According to Assistant Carlton County Attorney Jeffrey Boucher

— who is acting as county attorney until Lauri Ketola assumes office in January and whose office responded to a public data request from the Pine Knot News last week — the county attorney's office dismissed 18 pending cases involving Cloquet Police Officer Scott Beckman and did not file charges in four other cases. The attorney's office is in the process of reviewing approximately 25 more cases involving Beckman.

An 18-year veteran of the department, Beckman was the subject of

a closed council meeting in August 2016 about allegations of possible police misconduct. At that time, both former police chief Steve Stracek and former city administrator Brian Fritsinger recommended to the council that Beckman's employment be terminated after an outside investigation had determined that he falsified a search warrant application and conducted an incomplete investigation.

According to the minutes of the  
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## 'The man who was Santa Claus'

Mike Creger  
Pine Knot News



Victor E. Swenson

They came in droves to Zion Lutheran Church in Cloquet. On this Wednesday in mid-September 1947, shops and factories closed, children eschewed school. There, at the church, flowers — some paid for by those children using coins from their piggy banks — were placed near the departed Victor Swenson. They came from the reservation. They came from the far-flung rural areas in Carlton County and Duluth.

"The man who was Santa Claus" was dead, and the thousands of people whose lives he had touched mourned.

For nearly 50 years, children in Carlton County didn't have to merely "believe" in Santa Claus. He lived among them. Each December, beginning in 1900, Swenson would distribute candy and fruit to children along with stories, "heartily guffaws," and a kindness that brightened the season, even in Cloquet's worst days after the 1918 fire.

We came across stories about Vic Swenson in two clippings in Minneapolis newspapers after his death, the Star and the Tribune. We also found details of his life in an obituary and editorial tribute in the Pine Knot, Cloquet's newspaper.

In one story, Chub Cash, down at the filling station he ran in 1947, succinctly described Swenson's legacy in the community: "No matter how many good things you say about Vic, you can't exaggerate."

Victor E. Swenson was born on March 21, 1882, in Cannon Falls in southern Minnesota. He was the son of the Rev. C.O. Swenson, who in 1899 moved his family to Cloquet to serve the Swedish Lutheran church, today's Zion.

Vic got a job at the Northern Lumber Company store. It was there where he picked up the melange of languages the employees spoke. During the Christmas season, he would distribute candy and fruit to children of the employees in novelty pails left over from the President McKinley re-election campaign, which had a slogan of keeping Americans flush with "A full dinner pail."

As the years went on, "in spite of blizzards, lumbago and the 1918 fire," George Peterson wrote in the Star, Vic began expanding his spread of holiday joy.

He didn't look the typical part of Santa in the beginning. Peterson reported that Vic first wore a simple sheepskin coat and mask. He would take a week off from his work to entertain people with "exuberant singing, dancing, storytelling," the Star story said.

He visited the Sawyer School on the reservation and spoke Ojibwe. At Esko Corners he spoke Finnish. Kids at the Cloquet school tested his French. He also spoke the familiar Swedish and Norwegian he grew up with.

The tragedy of the 1918 fire likely burnished Vic's legendary status in the community. He made his rounds to the "tarpaper shacks," bringing a little light to a bleak existence.

The Duluth News Tribune encapsulated the mood that December by printing a letter to Santa Claus from

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Josette tells Santa what her little sister Viola wants for Christmas during the Pine Knot News open house.

## Come one, come all to Christmas dinner

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Christmas will be here before we know it, and Cloquet's Dave Johnson wants to make sure nobody is left out.

Everyone is invited to the 25th annual Cloquet Area Community Christmas Day dinner at 2 p.m. Christmas Day at Zion Lutheran Church, 1000 Washington Ave., Cloquet.

No money? Don't worry, it's free. Need a ride? Someone will pick you up.

Can't leave home? Volunteers will also be delivering meals.

However — and this is important — anyone who wants transportation or a meal delivered must call the Zion Lutheran Church by noon Sunday, Dec. 23 to get on the list.

Volunteers are also asked to call Zion by Sunday.

This year's meal is supported by donations from ministry, individuals and businesses, said Johnson.

"We'll have 40-plus donors by the time this is done," said the long-time organizer.

He explained that the free Christmas dinner started 25 years ago as an outreach effort by the church.

"Then it got so big it basically became its own entity," Johnson said, explaining that the church is still very involved and hosts the dinner, but they get volunteers from all over, even outside the state.

"We've had volunteers from Silver Bay, the Twin Cities, Wisconsin, and Ed Baumann's son, his wife and two

daughters from California," Johnson said. "Of course, most of them are here visiting relatives."

Johnson said he expects to serve close to 700 dinners, between those who come to the church to eat, carry out food, or order a meal delivered.

Dinner will include roasted ham, meatballs from B&B Market, and side orders including potatoes and gravy, vegetables and rolls. They have 50 fruit pies coming from Super One and two cakes coming from The Exchange. Appetizers include shrimp, fruit and veggie trays. Of course there will be Christmas cookies. And there will be lots of giveaways, on top of all the free food.

Santa Claus is coming to the dinner too, so kids can talk to him about their wishes for Christmas and beyond.

What is Johnson's top wish for Christmas?

Pray for good weather, he said.



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