

Josh Bahr made a big impact on KC's Best

Life, Page A6

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Saturday, August 15, 2020

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ELECTION 2020

Peterson to begin Ward 2 term on Monday

By Matthew Liedke
mliedke@bemidjipioneer.com

BEMIDJI — After more than six months, the residents of Bemidji Ward 2 will have a representative on the City Council again.



Peterson

In Tuesday's special election, Josh Peterson defeated Jaime Thibodeaux 224-145 for the seat, which he will now hold through 2022.

Peterson, 39, is the executive director of Visit Bemidji. Previously, he worked for Lakeland PBS News. His opponent, Thibodeaux, is a 38-year-old environmental ecologist.

"I'm excited to get to work on Monday right away, I'm ready to share the thoughts and concerns of the people of Ward 2," Peterson said. "It's been a long time for the people of Ward 2 to not have a voice at the city council table."

WARD 2: Page A5

Majority of county voters opt for mail or absentee

By Matthew Liedke
mliedke@bemidjipioneer.com

BEMIDJI — A total of 6,643 Beltrami County residents voted in Tuesday's primary, with the majority of them doing so by mail-in and absentee ballots.

According to County Auditor-Treasurer JoDee Treat, there were 3,464 citizens voting by mail or absentee, and 3,179 residents voting at polling places. Treat said the number of mail-in and absentee ballots processed by her department was nearly three times more than usual.

"We had quite a few more absentee and mail ballots than we've had in the past," Treat said. "There was a lot more work in our office processing those ballots. Then election night precincts came in and those were processed and added to what we had counted."

Treat said after Tuesday's primary, ballots postmarked by Tuesday that arrived up to a day before the canvassing day were also allowed. As a result, Treat said nearly 200 more ballots arrived after the primary.

When the November General Election gets closer, Treat said

VOTE TOTALS: Page A5



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

Ward 1 resident Brittany Carlson votes on Tuesday at BSU's American Indian Resource during the primary election.

READY FOR MAIN EVENT

Winners of primary excited for the General Election

By Matthew Liedke
mliedke@bemidjipioneer.com

The field of candidates running in local races was narrowed to 10 on Tuesday with Bemidji residents casting their votes for the November hopefuls.

The race receiving the most votes was the mayoral contest, with six candidates competing. Jorge Prince earned 959 votes in the primary and Michael Meehlhause received 453, advancing them on to the November General Election. They earned the top slots ahead of Mark Thorson with 396



Prince



Meehlhause

votes, John Henningsgaard with 356, Robert Elliott with 115 and Ivan Smith with 58.

In total, 2,337 Bemidji residents voted in the mayoral primary. In comments following the primary, both hopefuls for Bemidji mayor thanked the voters.

PRIMARY RESULTS

BEMIDJI MAYOR RESULTS

- ▶ Jorge Prince, 959 votes.
- ▶ Michael Meehlhause, 453 votes.
- ▶ Mark Thorson, 396 votes.
- ▶ John Henningsgaard, 356 votes.
- ▶ Robert Elliott, 155 votes.
- ▶ Ivan Smith, 58 votes.

BEMIDJI WARD 1 RESULTS

- ▶ Audrey Thayer, 151 votes.
- ▶ Joe Gould, 67 votes.
- ▶ Adam Hellquist, 32 votes.
- ▶ Laura Fairbanks, 27 votes.
- ▶ Ryan Enger, 14 votes.

BEMIDJI WARD 3 RESULTS

- ▶ Ron Johnson, 371 votes.
- ▶ Greg Kuhn, 152 votes.
- ▶ Paul Wiese, 88 votes.

BEMIDJI WARD 5 RESULTS

- ▶ Nancy Erickson, 241 votes.
- ▶ Don Heinonen, 165 votes.
- ▶ Ernest Oppegaard-Peltier III, 126 votes.

BELTRAMI COUNTY DISTRICT 5 RESULTS

- ▶ Jim Lucachick, 880 votes.
- ▶ Mike Bredon, 295 votes.
- ▶ Christian Taylor-Johnson, 261 votes.

"Thank you so very much to everyone who came out and voted for me," said Prince in a Facebook video. "I heard you loud and clear yesterday,

you voted for a new vision for Bemidji, one that involves solving our many city issues. I

PRIMARY: Page A5

An epidemic within a pandemic

Region sees uptick in drug overdoses

By Hannah Olson
holson@bemidjipioneer.com

BEMIDJI — While the world grapples with a viral pandemic, a quieter epidemic is still raging. Drug overdoses have seen a large uptick in the area in recent months. Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force Commander Joe Kleszyk and Bemidji Police Chief Mike Mastin weigh in with numbers, potential reasons and preventative measures.

Overdoses by the numbers

How large of an uptick?

It's tricky to tell. Breaking it down a bit, in the second quarter of 2020 — April to June — there were 36 overdoses in the region assisted by the Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force. Of those, eight people died.

This is in contrast with 16 overdoses that the Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force assisted with throughout all of 2019.

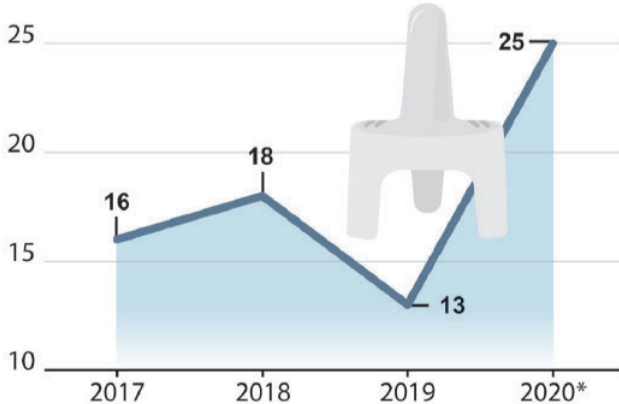
Looking at those numbers, the increase seems astronomical. Kleszyk said while there has certainly been an uptick, this isn't necessarily the case. Kleszyk has been work-

ing in narcotics-related law enforcement for a long time, but just became the Task Force Commander last year. He said due to the change in leadership, the way overdoses are recorded and reported has changed. Overdoses are something they count and track, but not part of the numbers the Task Force reports to the state quarterly. This may make up for some of the difference as overdoses in past years were likely under reported.

OVERDOSES: Page A11

Narcan deployments

The Bemidji Police Department has had a program supplying all its officers with Narcan since 2017. In the time since then, it has been deployed 72 times.



* Number of deployments as of August 4th.

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OVERDOSES

From Page A1



a time. They go to the new source, they try X amount of their product, which is maybe exponentially stronger. And because they didn't cut it as much, they overdose."

Kleszyk also mentioned it's hard to find a balance between issuing safety warnings and accidentally increasing demand for a drug. For example, in May, the Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force sent out a release warning people about blue pills being sold as Percocet.

"They happened to be laced with what we believe was fentanyl or something similar to that. And they had overdoses because of that," Mastin said. "So someone who maybe has an addiction to a prescription drug buys it not realizing that it has far more than they expected."

Kleszyk said the warning may have inadvertently caused more people to seek out the blue pills.

Why else are overdoses on the rise? Some experts are pointing to COVID-19.

"I've read some articles and some research papers over the last couple of months that have definitely shown a nationwide trend in overdoses going up that the researchers attribute to COVID-19, you know, isolation, depression kind of coincides with substance abuse," Kleszyk said. "It makes perfect sense that people aren't using together as much, people are staying at home and people are socially distancing, and where maybe they normally would use in a group of people, if they overdose, you know, they don't have somebody there to help them."

While Kleszyk said the increase is likely not as drastic as the numbers suggest, Mastin's data regarding the use of Narcan on overdose responses shows a significant uptick as well.

Narcan was deployed 13 times in 2019. In the first seven months of 2020, it was already deployed 25 times by Bemidji police.

Death prevention
Kleszyk explained that overdose prevention isn't as simple as just telling people not to do drugs, and he is sympathetic to users because addiction is a disease.

When it comes to preventing overdose deaths, time is of the essence. People are often afraid of getting in trouble if they see someone overdosing, and often wait until it is too late to contact emergency services.

"People are afraid to call the police," Kleszyk said. But they may not have to be.

Kleszyk and Mastin both hope to spread awareness of a Good Samaritan law in place in Minnesota, which is a regulation intended to save lives.

Minnesota's Good Samaritan law protects a person seeking medical assistance for someone experiencing a drug-related overdose; they may not be charged or prosecuted for the possession, sharing or use of a controlled substance or pos-



Ken Chase / WDAY News

Narcan, also known as naloxone, has increased in prevalence in recent years.

session of drug paraphernalia.

Although these are only in effect if the person calling is cooperative and doesn't flee the scene.

"I think there is that fear for people, they don't want to get in trouble. They know their friend needs help. Sometimes maybe they're reluctant to call before something bad really happens," Mastin said. "You should be calling right away because time, time is valuable and calling for help could mean the difference between survival or not. People should be aware of that."

Kleszyk said in order to help get someone the medical attention needed, it is important to give dispatchers all of the relevant information.

"Know the exact address. We can't get help to somebody if we don't know where to send the help," he said.

It is also important to try to tell dispatchers what the person took.

"Was this a powder? Was it a pill? Is the person alert? Are they breathing? Do they have a pulse? Has Narcan been used?" he said.

Narcan

Narcan, also known as naloxone, has increased in prevalence in recent years. It is a medication used to block the effects of opioids, often in a nasal spray or injection form.

The Bemidji Police Department was the first in northwestern Minnesota to equip all of its officers with Narcan, Mastin said.

He compared Narcan to a defibrillator, "We have those in all of our squad cars with the idea that we're there to save and preserve lives and that's the same approach we have with Narcan, it's a tool that can help us save a life," he said.

The medication costs around \$70 a dose.

"Since we started, we've had 72 deployments of Narcan," Mastin said. "So we have saved 72 lives. I think that's important for people to realize. So there's 72 people that are still here or at least were brought back during emergency medical efforts."

Kleszyk added that Narcan is also carried by most if not all members of law enforcement involved in the Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force.

"As far as the Paul Bunyan task force area goes, I think most, if not all, (law enforcement officers) carry Narcan. A lot of it's available personally, you know, people have their own personal supply of it," he said. "It's available, opioid programs give it out, harm reduction programs give it out. So there's definitely people getting saved by Narcan that's not coming from EMS or our law enforcement."

About the Task Force

Founded in 1988, the multi-jurisdictional task force includes members from 14 different agencies from northern Minnesota. They include the police departments from Bemidji, International Falls, and Park Rapids; the sheriff offices of Beltrami County, Cass County, Hubbard County, Koochiching County, Mahanomen County, as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Leech Lake Indian Reservation and White Earth Reservation.

To help visualize that area, parts of the Task Force's coverage area extends from Motley, located about an hour and a half south of Bemidji, all the way up to International Falls. The boundaries of the White Earth Nation extend almost to Detroit Lake. Leech Lake Nation goes almost to Grand Rapids.

Kleszyk said the reason for the cooperation and large area is to help better catch drug traffickers and distributors who often work across city and county lines.

"The point of a drug task force is these criminals and people trafficking drugs, they don't know what a county line or a city limit sign is," he said. "And to have a group of people that work together, to be able to cross from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and work on these cases together," he said.

Hannah Olson is a multimedia reporter for the Pioneer. She can be reached at (507) 676-1101.

PAID BUSINESS BRIEF

Moore Engineering Celebrates 60 Years

West Fargo, N.D. – On September 1, 2020, Moore Engineering, Inc. will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the company by hosting a ribbon-cutting ceremony at its headquarters in West Fargo, N.D. Brothers, Kip and Marshall Moore, founded Moore Engineering in 1960 and Moore has been improving lives by building strong communities ever since. Over 21,000 civil engineering projects have been completed in the past 60 years and this number continues to grow year after year. As of 2020, there are nearly 150 employees who work in seven different locations across N.D. and M.N.

Moore values respect, integrity, accountability, loyalty, and kindness towards coworkers, clients, and neighbors. These attributes flow from being a 100% employee-owned company. As Moore looks to the future, they are excited to continue their legacy of bettering the quality of life for their communities by implementing innovative solutions. Visit mooreengineeringinc.com/about/60th-anniversary to help celebrate the milestones that have made the company what it is today!

About Moore Engineering
Moore Engineering is a 100 percent employee-owned civil engineering and land surveying company creating sustainable solutions for public and private clients in the Upper Midwest from offices in Bismarck, Minot, West Fargo and Williston, North Dakota, and Bemidji, Fergus Falls and St. Cloud, Minnesota. For 60 years, Moore Engineering has strived to improve lives by helping build strong communities. To learn more about Moore Engineering, visit www.mooreengineeringinc.com.



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- Must possess knowledge of general ledger, accounts payable, accounts receivable and revenue recognition.
- Must have excellent oral and written communication, organizational, time management, conflict resolution, and analytical skills, proficient with computers and other office equipment.
- Must be able to manage multiple deadlines and tasks efficiently and effectively.
- Must have the ability to maintain the utmost level of confidentiality.

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