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St. Cloud Times

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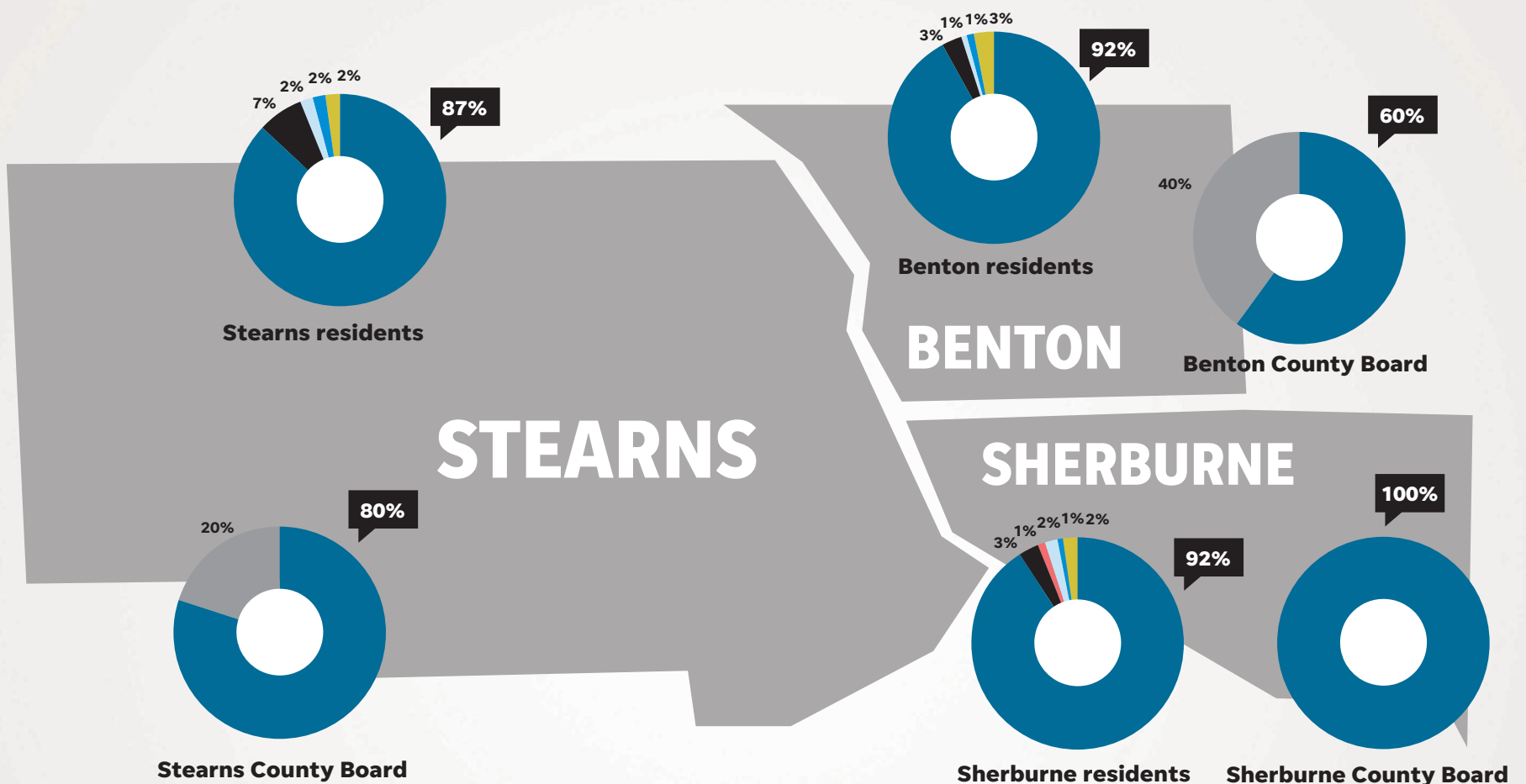
HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE AREA COUNTIES?

DOES DIVERSITY AID GOVERNING?

Stearns, Benton, Sherburne boards want range of voices to be heard

Nora G. Hertel St. Cloud Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

Commissioner Tarryl Clark is the second woman to serve on the Stearns County board in its 165-year history. ■ That history includes a lot of good commissioners, said Clark, who won the seat in 2018. But electing another woman was “a long time coming.” ■ “It’s important to have our boards reflect our communities,” Clark said. “That can be hard when it’s a five-person board.” ■ Elected bodies in the St. Cloud area tend to have more men than women and skew older and whiter than the population at large. Sherburne County is an exception in one regard: three of the five commissioners are women. See DIVERSITY, Page 6A



Area Diversity: Stearns, Sherburne and Benton County Boards compared to resident profiles

● White ● Black or African American ● American Indian & Alaska Native ● Asian ● Another race ● Two or more races ● Unknown

Sources: U.S. Census data and 2020 St. Cloud Times demographics survey. One Stearns County commissioner and two Benton County commissioners did not complete the survey. Timothy Riethmiller, USA TODAY

Life experiences shape legislators

Gender, race also factor into how lawmakers see issues

Nora G. Hertel St. Cloud Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

In the past couple months, state Rep. Lisa Demuth, R-Cold Spring, got a call from a business owner in the state who asked to speak to her husband, assuming that “Rep. Demuth” was a man.

“I thought, ‘Oh, isn’t that cute?’ ” Demuth said. “No disrespect.”

She did not run for office because she’s a woman, she said. She ran because she saw a need, first for the ROCORI school board, then for the state House.

Women are underrepresented in legislatures across the country and make up about 32% of the Minnesota Legislature, according to the Center for American Women in Politics.

Women, including Demuth, are 33% of the delegation in Minnesota Districts 13 and 14, which cover St. Cloud, its suburbs and communities to the south and west.

The St. Cloud Times sent demographic surveys to elected officials throughout the area and compared the data to U.S. census data, with a particular focus on gender, race and age. Experts say diversity is a good thing on boards. And candidates’ experience, in government and life, matters to their work and to constituents once they’re elected.

The unscientific surveys asked about other characteristics, such as veteran status and religious affiliation, because those things reflect who lawmakers are and how they serve.

“Age brings experience; experience brings knowledge.”

Sen. Jerry Relph R-St. Cloud

The delegation from Districts 13 and 14 includes two veterans with disabilities. It’s also primarily white.

Demuth is biracial. Her mother’s white. Her father’s black.

“That has impacted my entire life, including work, much more than gender,” Demuth said about her race. But it’s not what she leads with when

See LAWMAKERS, Page 6A

Coming Tuesday

The Times wraps up its special coverage of diversity and representation in Central Minnesota. Look for a story exploring the makeup of leaders in St. Cloud’s suburbs, as well as demographic trends of the officials who responded to a recent Times survey.

More online

Check out interactive charts and graphs at sctimes.com.

USA TODAY

Nursing home goal missed: White House’s call for more resident, staff testing labeled as poor use of time. 7A

Continuing to rise

Number of positive cases of the coronavirus in Minnesota exceed 20,000. 3A

Weather

High 76° ■ Low 61°
Mostly cloudy, showers.
Forecast, 6B

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