

Diversity

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“They obviously have figured it out,” Clark quipped during a phone interview in early May.

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’ experiences, in government and life, matter to their work and to constituents once they’re elected.

“It’s not enough to be a woman or man. You want someone who’s going to do a good job,” Clark said. Candidates have to be ready to run more than once to build name recognition, and women often need more convincing than men to throw their hat in the ring.

Across the state, only 16% of county commissioners are women, Clark said. Studies show increasing the number of women on a board helps with efficiency and problem-solving.

Women tend to be very collaborative, Clark said.

Yes, elected women may be a sounding board for female constituents or more comfortable with some issues such as breastfeeding or domestic violence, she said. But male officials are often parents too, and female officials have made an impact on tax policy and environmental issues.

Clark previously served in the Minnesota Senate.

The Times’ unscientific survey shows the Stearns County board is 20% women, Sherburne is 60% women and Benton County’s board has 0% women.

Twelve of the 15 commissioners in those three counties responded to the survey. While it’s a snapshot in time, it shows the majority of members are practicing Christians, married and homeowners. None identified themselves as a veteran or a member of the LGBTQ community.

And Central Minnesota commissioners tend to be older than the general population, and many are retired or self-employed.



Commissioner Tarryl Clark is the second woman to serve on the Stearns County board in its 165-year history. ZACH DWYER/ST. CLOUD TIMES

Tim Dolan is the youngest commissioner to complete the survey. The 37-year-old serves on the Sherburne County board.

He encouraged a rebranding of county government and launched a Facebook group to gather feedback from residents throughout Sherburne County.

“That wouldn’t exist without someone my age or close to my age coming on the board,” Dolan said. “If it’s technology-related, if it’s culture-related, my colleagues generally look to me to be some manner of subject matter expert.”

There are a few reasons county board elections draw an older crowd. It’s a big time commitment during daytime hours.

“It’s full-time enough to not allow you to have another full-time job,” said Dolan, who owns a consulting firm with his wife. “Most county boards are close to or well beyond retirement age, or they’re entrepreneurs and own their own business or are farmers in rural areas.”

The office essentially requires you to put your career on hold, a tough sell for someone in their 20s, 30s or 40s, Dolan said.

Dolan brings some generational diversity to the board, and he’s a male in

the minority. When it comes to race, the Sherburne County board is 100% white. About 8% of the county is not white.

Dolan tries to reach out to constituents, including minorities, through the Facebook group, at public events like the farmers market and at informal gatherings. That outreach includes all demographics, he said, including people who aren’t comfortable testifying in front of the full county board at a formal meeting.

“My theory is: Meet people where they are,” Dolan said.

Clark would like to see more women and more people in general involved in local boards.

“The more our boards and commissions can better reflect gender, the more effective they will likely be,” she said. “It’s important to have all different kinds of voices: younger, older, different ethnicities, people who are differently able, rural.”

“We could do better as a community when our representation reflects the communities that we serve,” Clark said.

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Candidate filing runs through June 2

The two-week filing period for most federal, state and local elected offices started May 19 and runs to 5 p.m. June 2.

Those offices include the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, the Minnesota Legislature, county boards, St. Cloud City Council, St. Cloud school board, Sartell City Council and Sauk Rapids City Council.

Mayoral seats in St. Cloud and Sauk Rapids are also up for election.

In cities and school districts that do not have primary elections, the filing period is from July 28 to Aug. 11. Those include Waite Park, St. Joseph and St. Augusta, as well as Sartell-St. Stephen and Sauk Rapids-Rice school districts.

Candidates for most state and county offices file at the county auditor’s office. City candidates file with the city clerk, and school board candidates file with the school district clerk.

Across the state, only 16% of county commissioners are women, said Tarryl Clark, member of the Stearns County board. Studies show increasing the number of women on a board helps with efficiency and problem-solving. Women tend to be very collaborative, Clark said.

Lawmakers

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interacting with people.

In first grade, other children used a racial slur to her face – “a lot,” she said. But she had a teacher, and the principal, who backed her up as well as the support of her family. “I felt accepted by them and empowered by them.”

Demuth serves House District 13A, which doesn’t have many minorities. In the whole of Districts 13 and 14, about 87% of the population is white.

“I still want to be a voice for all,” Demuth said. Her family ties and her Christian faith have the biggest influence on her work as an elected official.

“If I can give families a good strong start, it makes for healthier communities and that crosses every racial barrier,” she said.



Relph



Demuth

Elected officials tend to be older than the population at large. Part of that is because minors cannot run for office and young adults often do not. And life experience can help a candidate win.

In Districts 13 and 14, two-thirds of the lawmakers are between 50 and 64 years old. One is between 21 and 34. And Sen. Jerry Relph, R-St. Cloud, is older than 64. “Age brings experience; experience brings knowledge,” Relph said. Those traits also bring patience.

Relph is a veteran of the Vietnam War

and disabled from his time in the service. He served in the Marines as a first lieutenant and was exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange, which led to prostate cancer. “I can relate to those who’ve been in combat,” Relph said. And he’s involved in multiple veterans groups, so he hears from veterans.

Two of the St. Cloud-area lawmakers surveyed, or 33%, are veterans with service-related disabilities. In the state, veterans make up about 6% of the population.

Military service teaches adaptability and leadership skills, Relph said, which have helped him in private business and in elected office.

But Relph doesn’t serve on the Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Committee, so he is not closely involved with those policies.

He does serve on the Senate Family Care and Aging Committee.

“At this age, I am a little more sensi-

tive to the needs of people who are elderly and try to formulate policy to improve and sustain their quality of life,” Relph said.

People with disabilities make up more than 11% of the population in Districts 13 and 14.

Relph has not experienced limited mobility, but he can relate to other impairments, he said. “It’s an important experience.”

Relph tries to connect with a range of interest groups, including those unlike himself. “My job is to give my constituents a forum,” Relph said. “Every voice needs to be heard. Some will have more compelling arguments than others.”

“It’s a cliché but it’s true: We’re all in this together,” he said.

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In Loving Memory

We remember those who have passed away and are especially dear to us.

<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>Butch Skudlarek Feb. 19, 1954 - Oct. 23, 2019 In our heart your memory lingers touching our lives forever. <i>Your Loving Wife & Family</i></p>	<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>Leora Honer May 28, 1922 - Sept. 7, 2017 Life is very empty without you as we were so happy together. <i>Your loving husband Pete</i></p>	<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>David Pflipsen Sept. 11, 1935 - Oct. 24, 2017 There is a link death cannot sever, love and remembrance last forever. <i>Your Loving Wife Evie & Family</i></p>	<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>Gene Schreifels April 9, 1932 - Jan. 11, 2015 In our heart we keep the memories of the one we loved so dear. <i>Your loving Wife and Family</i></p>	<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>Linda Neu May 6, 1951 - Dec. 12, 2019 Sweetly tender, fond and true, there’s never a day that we do not think of you. <i>Your Loving Family</i></p>	<p><i>In Loving Memory</i></p>  <p>James F. Dehn Mar. 21, 1938 - April 25, 2005 The smile you wore, the way you talked and a thousand more things we remember. <i>Love, Your Family</i></p>
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