

# IT resignation causes concerns

**Becker County goes into crisis mode after losing two-thirds of team**

By Nathan Bowe  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

DETROIT LAKES — The Becker County Sheriff’s Office is deeply concerned about the loss of technical support for officers on patrol and in the office, and for correctional officers at the jail, following the recent resignation of two-thirds of the Information Technology team at Becker County.

The exodus of Becker County employees is largely due to the management style of new Becker County Administrator Pat Oman, according to interviews with a number of past and present county employees. Oman became Becker County administrator on Dec. 14, a little over six months ago.

For his part, Oman says the talk of an exodus is overblown, and that the county is simply losing people to retirement or better career opportunities elsewhere. “They are leaving for good reasons,” he said in an interview. “We wish them well.”

“Our concern is for public safety,” Becker

County Sheriff Todd Glander said in an interview. “If we’re not running on all cylinders, we’re feeling it, one way or the other.”

Those four seasoned IT staffers kept the county running on all cylinders, according to Glander and Chief Deputy Shane Richard, who is involved with a lot of the technical issues with the sheriff’s office.

They “were very valuable at helping us when we had issues here,” Glander said. Law enforcement relies a lot on technology, with the computer systems at the jail, the dispatch center, squad car computers, law enforcement radio systems, and technology linking the sheriff’s office with state law enforcement, other counties and cities, and the County Attorney’s Office, among many other examples, he said.

Technical problems, big and small, come up often in any work environment, including law enforcement, and the county IT staff helps out on a daily basis, Richard said. The small stuff is one thing, but “we have critical systems,” he added. “When we have a

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Paula Quam / Tribune

Becker County Sheriff Todd Glander.



Photos by Barbie Porter / Detroit Lakes Tribune

After going to therapy, Ava Guaman-Person, 17, was able to share her secret — that she had been sexually abused by a member of their extended family. Her mother, Renna Person-Fabel, experienced a similar trauma. With her secret in the light, the Detroit Lakes resident is looking towards her future for the first time.

# BREAKING FREE

## DL grad works through trauma of sexual abuse

Ava Guaman-Person, 17, spent most of her life scared of telling her mom Renna Person-Fabel of the sexual abuse she endured. Both the Detroit Lakes women have experienced the trauma.



By Barbie Porter  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

At 17, Ava Guaman-Person, broke the circle of generational trauma. Both she and her mother, Renna, were sexually abused as children and teenagers.

The Detroit Lakes residents traveled in the same circular patterns in an attempt to avoid facing their trauma. The result was rage, misplaced shame, rebellious behaviors and risky choices.

“It really is a cycle,” Ava said. “And, I needed to stand up and not let it destroy me. I needed to make a change.”

From her decision to seek help from a therapist, her mother Renna found courage to stay the course of recovery.

Renna looked at her oldest child and said, “You are my strength.”

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# Sneak peak at City Hall

**\$5.7M DL admin building remodeling plan unveiled**

By Michael Achterling  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

Members of the Detroit Lakes City Council received an update on the \$5.7 million city hall remodel project from BHH Partners during their meeting on Tuesday.

Project manager Matt Malone, of BHH Partners, said the remodeled facility will incorporate a series of conservation and sustainability features and, overall, will add about



Contributed / BHH Partners

Artist rendition of the building exterior of the Detroit Lakes city hall remodel project. Final color scheme and fixtures are still subject to change.

3,400 square feet to the 18,000-square-foot building by switching the entrance to Frazee Street.

“We’re looking at changing the orientation of the main entrance to city hall,

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# West Lake Drive project to start this summer

By Michael Achterling  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

The West Lake Drive Phase One street and utility project, between Legion Road and County Road 6, received bid approval from the Detroit Lakes City Council during a special meeting on June 21.

The city joined the Becker County Board, which met earlier in the day, in approving the bid for the joint project. The cost sharing between the authorities for Phase One of the West Lake Drive project is 70%, or \$3.563 million, covered by Becker County and 30%, or \$1.507 million, by the city of Detroit Lakes.

After the meeting, Jon Pratt, city engineer for

Detroit Lakes, said the approval of bids for both phases of the West Lake Drive project represented seven years of work by multiple staff members over the years.

“It’s certainly going to be, at some level, exciting to get this project moving,” said Pratt. “We started working, in earnest, on this project in 2015. That was the year we actually started doing material work ... of getting some grant funding and planning the project out ... so it’s taken a long time to get to this point.”

Pratt also said the goal for both phases of the West Lake Drive project is to have pavement,

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# 86<sup>TH</sup> NORTHWEST WATERCARNIVAL

July 8th - 17th, 2022

Family Day • Street Dance • Demo Derby • Water Fights • Tug-A-War • Bingo • Bash on the Beach • Parade

For event details visit: <https://www.dljaycees.com/events-calendar>

**FRIDAY, JULY 8**  
City Wide Garage Sales  
Water Carnival Kick Off Party w/ Born to Late & October Road  
Night Frisbee Golf

**SATURDAY, JULY 9**  
Midsummer Bike Tour  
City Wide Garage Sales  
Dangerzone Crazy's Crash Course  
Fly-in and Drive-in  
Regatta - Sailboats  
Stomp That Stigma Remembrance Walk  
Lakes Area Farmers Market

**DEMO DERBY**  
**SUNDAY, JULY 10 FAMILY DAY**  
Sidewalk Chalk Contest  
Trolley Rides  
Turtle/Frog Races  
Sand Dig  
Toddler Trot  
Ship Building  
Face Painting  
Family Picnic  
Inner Tube Races  
Sand Castle Contest  
Pup Plunge

Watermelon Feed  
Water Balloon/Egg Toss  
**MONDAY, JULY 11**  
Xtreme Tippy Cup  
Beach Soccer  
Trivia  
**TUESDAY, JULY 12**  
Lakes Area Farmers Market  
Junior Pageant  
Dance on Detroit w/ Doc & The Scrubs  
Junior Tug-O-War / Strong Person  
Tug-O-War/Strong Person  
**WEDNESDAY, JULY 13**

Great Admirals Hat Hunt  
Junior Water Fights  
Ice Cream Social  
Water Fights  
**THURSDAY, JULY 14**  
Home Brew Beer Tasting  
BINGO  
CITY FOOD TRUCK IN THE PARK  
**FRIDAY, JULY 15**  
Kegs & Eggs w/ KFan's  
Power Trip Morning Show

Softball Tournament (Fri - Sun)  
Legion Water Carnival Baseball Tournament (Fri-Sun)  
Rotary Food Trucks  
Inflatable Games w/ Games to Go  
**BASH on the BEACH**  
featuring: Fabulous Armadillos and HAIRBALL  
**SATURDAY, JULY 16**  
Water Carnival Fun Run  
Pet & Doll Parade  
Pet Show

Sand Volleyball Tournament  
Bean Bag Tournament  
Classic Car Show  
Family Picnic  
Junior Bean Bag Tournament  
Inflatable Games w/ Games to Go  
**BASH on the BEACH**  
featuring: Troubadour and Eddie Montgomery  
**SUNDAY, JULY 17TH**  
KC Pancake Breakfast  
Parade of the Northwest  
Water Ski Show

**86<sup>TH</sup> NORTHWEST WATERCARNIVAL**  
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**HAIRBALL**  
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**EDDIE MONTGOMERY OF MONTGOMERY GENTRY**  
WITH SPECIAL GUEST TROUBADOUR  
**SATURDAY JULY 16<sup>TH</sup>**  
DOORS OPEN AT 6PM BOTH NIGHTS



## CONCERNS

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failure, we need someone with the knowledge of our systems here, someone who can basically spring into action and fix the issues.”

The situation is all the more frustrating for the sheriff’s office because one of those seasoned IT trouble-shooters wanted to stay after initially resigning, but was not allowed to.

The six-person county IT team includes a GPS specialist and a software developer, both of whom remain, but who work in a separate area and generally stay within their areas of expertise.

The four experienced trouble-shooters have left. Brent Hanson, the network guru, left in February and IT staffer Ron Sprafka eventually followed suit. Supervisor Stacie White also resigned and is leaving early next month.

That left IT staffer Joni Pace, who was with the county IT team for 11 years, and was especially committed to IT issues involving the sheriff’s office (her great-grandfather served as county sheriff).

She declined to be interviewed for this story, but Sprafka said that Pace had felt overwhelmed at being alone in the office when she put in her resignation.

She soon thought better of it and tried to rescind her resignation, but Oman refused to allow her to do so. “Your request to rescind your job resignation is denied,” Oman wrote to her. “Your last day with the county will be what you originally requested in your resignation letter, which was June 29th.”

She’s welcome to reapply, along with anyone else interested in the job, Oman said in an interview.

That lost opportunity was difficult for the sheriff’s office to swallow. “We (the county) have hired two new IT people, but they’re brand new,” Richard said. “It’s not their fault. There’s no way you can just switch your entire IT department and just expect things to function.”

In her resignation letter, Pace had high praise for White, the IT director.

“To Stacie: I have never had a harder working or more ethical boss,” Pace wrote. “We have gotten so much accomplished in the last six years and you have continually pushed and encouraged us to do more. You have led by example and set a strong work ethic and expectation for all of us, and I have been so proud of the team that we had and the work that we accomplished. It often is not understood how much goes



Becker County Administrator Pat Oman.

Nathan Bowe / Tribune



Detroit Lakes Tribune file photo

Becker County Veterans Service Officer Lauri Brooke

on behind the scenes in IT – we manage 60 servers, 8 locations, 350 users, etc. ... There is a deep infrastructure that is constantly being updated and improved, along with the daily support and forward thinking projects. Also, Stacie, thank you for creating an amazing team atmosphere. While none of us ever did anything together outside of work, inside of work we were a cohesive team and a family that cared greatly about doing a good job and serving the people of the county.”

IT staffer Ron Sprafka said the IT department had a tough couple of years, especially during the major disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. “We had pulled some miracles off during the course of this,” he said. But instead of appreciation, the IT staff felt like it was getting flak “for not doing more,” he said.

“I loved my job and the people I worked with, especially my immediate IT team,” he said.

His leaving, he said, “was the culmination of outright abuse and lack of respect by some of the (county) board members for years,” he said.

It didn’t help when Brent Hanson left the county IT team in February. “A network administrator is really hard to replace,” Sprafka said. And county administration was making it harder, not easier to find a solution by taking over the hiring process and not letting the IT people be involved, even in writing interview questions for applicants, he said.

At that point, Sprafka allowed himself to be recruited by a headhunting firm, and now works for a Fargo company.

### Veterans Services resignations

The two-person Veterans Service Office, including award-winning Veterans Service Officer Lauri Brooke, is also leaving. She has been serving the veterans of Becker County since 2006.

Brooke, an Army veteran, put it diplomatically: “I have a military background, and I believe you should follow the direction of leadership, but I was not comfortable with the direction that was being put in front of me,” she said in an interview. “A lot of good people who feel like they haven’t been listened to are now out the door, and a lot of good people are staying who hope the environment gets better for them.”

Brooke, 61, is passionate about helping veterans, and said she would have liked to work another four years for Becker County, but couldn’t do it in the current environment. She will be done in early July, unless, she said, county administration forces her out sooner, as it did with her long-time office manager Mary Lou Schmit and others.

Brooke, at least, has landed on her feet, and taken a job with the Disabled American Veterans organization in the Twin Cities, with the ability to work from home.

Oman put a positive spin on the loss, saying that now the county will be able to have a veteran’s service officer and a part-time veterans service officer, both qualified to help veterans. “When one window closes, another one opens,” he said.

### Board goes into crisis management mode

The County Board on Tuesday cobbled together an emergency plan for the Information Technology Department, but not without controversy.

“I’m at a loss for words,” said Commissioner Barry Nelson. “What we’ve had lately is difficult to swallow. ... Cyber security is vital. I think we have a real difficult road in

front of us, to say the least. We need to get a written policy to improve employee retention, and improve employee relations — we need a policy to not let things escalate the way they can. We have to retain good employees. We have to show them the worth we feel these employees have.”

To provide IT support, commissioners eventually agreed to contract for twice-a-week on-site help and 24-7 remote help with Morris (Minn.) Electronics, a well-regarded tech firm that has been providing back-up support to the Becker County IT team for years.

“This is an absolute necessity,” Nelson said, “but I want the current chair (Commissioner Larry Knutson), not the administrator, to sign the contract ... I trust you, Larry.”

It was agreed that both the chair and the administrator would sign the contract, providing oversight over any future changes.

Even so, commissioners at first shot down the proposed contract over concerns about potential costs and future obligations. “The contract lacks details,” Commissioner Ben Grimsley said. “I don’t understand who will come here and the rates of pay.”

Oman said he was comfortable moving ahead without the contract. “We don’t need a contract with them — we can do what we’ve done the last 10 years,” he told commissioners.

But later in the meeting, Nelson said he couldn’t just let it go, and brought it back.

“We are in critical need right now,” he told the board at one point. “You don’t know how critical it is ... we need them (Morris Electronics) right now in this transition time — we have to get them on board.”

Commissioners reconsidered and unanimously approved the contract.

Things are rocky in Becker County, and it may end up costing taxpayers, said Roger Meunier, business agent for Teamsters Local 320. There are currently three union grievances going to arbitration, and he expects each one to cost the county an average of \$10,000 to \$15,000 when resolved.

“Becker County is not a very good place for employees right now,” he said in an interview, adding, “Fifty-plus employees have left since Jan. 1 this year. A lot of them are just sick of leadership’s inability to lead.”

Oman said exit interviews show that the majority of employees leaving are not unhappy with the county, but rather are looking to improve their careers or retiring.

The county’s hiring process has been successful, he says, and the current total employee count is 320, with 24 open positions.

## GUAMAN-PERSON

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### Mother’s trauma began at 6, daughter’s at 4

Renna was introduced to pornography by a member of her extended family when she was six. The purpose, she believes, was to warp her understanding of appropriate behaviors and touch. She was 14 when she was raped. When she was 16, another predator molested her.

“I found out he had done the same thing to my mom,” Renna said.

Her daughter’s trauma began when she was 4 years old. Ava was also molested by a family friend. She woke up with no underwear on. The male explained that they were playing a game called doctor.

“I was so confused,” Ava said. “I think back on that now, and, my God, I was four. How could I understand?”

When Ava was six, she and her mother moved into her grandmother’s house in Fargo. It had become a refuge for family members who had fallen on hard times. To the best of Ava’s recollection, there were about 10 people living in a small house. It was there that an extended family member began to sexually abuse her.

“I was shooshed a lot,” she recalled. “I wish I had the bravery to speak about it before it happened again, but I didn’t.”

### From alcohol to rebellion, methods of acting out remained consistent

When memories of what happened rose, Renna decided to drown them in alcohol.

“I realized I could drink to suppress them,” she said. “But later – much later – I realized all those problems were there waiting for me when I sobered up.”

Renna stepped onto the path of recovery through inpatient treatment.

Watching her mom struggle with substances was a blessing for Ava. It showed her a glimpse of the road she may travel down if she grabbed for the same crutch to mask her pain. So, Ava walked down a different road. She became anxious, provocative, distant and the kind of teenager who would poke a sleeping bear without warning.

Renna saw herself in Ava, but she thought her daughter’s behaviors were residue from her baby seeing her struggle with alcohol.

“I had no idea what had occurred,” she said.

While Renna picked up the pieces to provide a more stable life for her loved ones, Ava was still in the eye of the storm.

“All I wanted, all I

wished for, was that I could tell my mom,” Ava said.

She knew her mother would believe her. The person who abused her started doing the same thing to another member of the family and was caught.

“My mom asked if anything happened to me because I spent time with him,” Ava said. “Inside I was screaming, but it was too intense and I just shook my head.”

Paralyzed with a sledgehammer of truth on her tongue, all Ava longed for was to be held in her mother’s arms; to release all the pain, sadness and confused emotions about those moments that twisted her mind.

“But, I always felt like a wall was separating us,” Ava said.

### The wall was imaginary

Ava’s path to salvation began as daily life altered with the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted, at the time, school was only being taught online and there were more hours to spend in her head.

The weight of the secret was suffocating her from within. She wanted to breathe with peace in her heart. She wanted to know what it felt like to shake free of the shadows that followed her and to live in the light of truth.

“I had tried therapy

before, but it wasn’t the right therapist for me,” Ava said. “And, at the time I was 13 and my mom was in the room with me.”

As a young woman, Ava decided she wanted to give therapy another try.

“It was gradual, but eventually enough was enough,” she said. “I didn’t want to suffer anymore. I didn’t want to live in anxiety. I didn’t want to struggle with trust and intimacy issues. I was done.”

She heard therapy sessions were being offered online, and the idea appealed to her.

“I liked being able to have a session in my room – my safe space,” Ava said. “I’m not sure if I would’ve been able to talk about it in an office.”

Opening up to her therapist helped reshape who she saw in the mirror. The voice in her mind belittling and condemning her — suggesting it was her fault because she didn’t fight tooth and nail -- was silenced with the truth.

“There was no reason for me to be ashamed,” she said, adding when she heard those words come out of her mouth, “It all came tumbling down.”

Still, telling her mom what happened was terrifying. Ava feared what her mother’s reaction might be -- to

the abuser and to her sobriety. Ava’s therapist offered to share her story, on her behalf, instead.

When the day came, Ava told her mom that her therapist needed to talk with her. As her mom went into her room, Ava left the house, grabbed her bike and headed to a friend’s house.

“My whole body was shaking,” she said. “My heart was beating out of my chest and I was sweating profusely.”

In a few hours, Ava received a text from her mom.

“It said, ‘we need to talk,’” Ava recalled. “That made me not want to go home even more, but I did.”

When Ava arrived home she found the moment she had longed for – with open arms her mother pulled her in and hugged her.

“She told me that she loved me and just held me,” Ava said. “She didn’t push me to speak, she just allowed me to open up on my own time.”

### Helping others break the silence barrier

Free from the shackles she placed on herself, Ava saw an opportunity with her high school graduation capstone project.

The Detroit Lakes High School graduating class of 2022 were put to the task of doing research

and creating an action plan to encourage change about a topic that they felt was important.

“I decided to focus my project on sexual abuse of children,” she said. “The most surprising fact I learned was that 93 percent of victims know their abusers. It’s heartbreaking.”

Ava didn’t know what to expect when she shared her project with classmates and the community. What she found were interested parents wanting her insight to protect their children, as well as classmates and adults who knew the pain of childhood sexual abuse on a personal level. Those conversations empowered Ava. She saw she could be an advocate who is not afraid to broach difficult conversations.

“It’s more important to bring light to the subject than to sweep it under the rug,” she said.

As Ava stands tall in the light of truth, she is continuing her therapy. And, for the first time, she is dreaming about her future.

“I never thought about college before,” she said. “Now, maybe I’ll become a history teacher or a park ranger. I feel more confident and alive than I have ever felt. Life is finally worth living; worth waking for. I got over the mountain I didn’t think I could climb.”