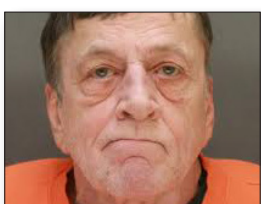




Groundbreaking

Due North Car Wash breaks ground.

See Page 2



Indicted

Grand jury indicts Gregory Ulrich.

See Page 6

MONTICELLO Times

Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021

Covering the cities of Monticello and Big Lake, and Wright and Sherburne counties \$1

Former chief linked to election smear campaign

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

For six months, investigators with the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), and Isanti County Attorney's Office investigated former Big Lake Police Chief Joel Scharf's involvement in an alleged smear campaign of a candidate for Big Lake City Council.

What was originally being investigated was the violation of a campaign law requiring a disclaimer on campaign materials stating who or what organization created and paid for the election materials.

Creating campaign materials or paying for them is not illegal and criminal charges against Scharf were never filed, but what investigators unraveled called into question the integrity of one of Big Lake's most visible public servants.

During the course of the investigation, investigators found that a website disparaging the character of former fire chief Ken Halverson during his candidacy for the Big Lake City Council was paid for with credit card accounts associated with Scharf and was linked to the



Joel Scharf

IP address associated with Scharf's home, and during the time Scharf's involvement in the creation of the election materials was ongoing, Scharf took a leave of absence from the department and sold his home.

Scharf tendered his resignation as police chief on April 23, 2021, 11 days prior to the BCA closing the case.

The investigation was closed by the BCA on May 4, 2021, after the Isanti County Attorney's Office declined to file criminal charges against Scharf. The county attorney's office stated that "the evidence surrounding Scharf is certainly suspicious, but we need more than suspicion and speculation- we need proof beyond a reasonable doubt, which we do not have."

The Monticello Times perused 237 pages of documents from the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and the Isanti County Attorney's Office, as well as minutes from Big Lake City Council meetings and real estate sales records in compiling this report.

Friction between chiefs

Investigation transcripts between BCA investigators, Scharf, and Halverson suggest there was friction be-

Investigation / See page x

Hayen placed on leave, Olson to be acting chief

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

Sgt. Sam Olson was slated to be appointed to the position of acting police chief by the Big Lake City Council October 13 according to the consent agenda for the Wednesday meeting.

The move comes after Police Chief Matt Hayen was placed on a leave of absence, according to a City of Big Lake staff report in the council's Oct. 13 agenda packet.

As acting chief, Olson will officially take on the role of managing operations of the Big Lake Police Department on a day-to-day basis.

Hayen was placed on leave September 13 after a complaint was filed against the police chief.

Hayen himself served as the acting chief of the

Chief / See page 9

Practicing firefighting skills



Photo by Jeffrey Hage / Monticello Times

Big Lake firefighter Matthew Houle assists Delilah Reimringer in a game of waterball at the Big Lake Fire Department's open house on Sunday, Oct. 11 at the fire station on County Road 43 in Big Lake. Waterball consists of taking water from a fire hose and spraying a plastic bucket with water in an effort to move the bucket along a cable.

Fundraiser helping man seriously injured in crash

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

An area family is reaching out for help after a man was seriously injured in a semi crash on a Wisconsin interstate.

Buffalo native Cameron Hazzard, who graduated from Maple Lake High School, is on a long road to recovery after being released Friday, Oct. 8 from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Hazzard, who with his finance Makayla recently started Innovative Transportation Solutions, was injured in the four-vehicle crash near Warrens, Wisconsin on Sunday, Oct. 3.

According to the Wisconsin State Patrol, the crash happened at about 9 p.m. when a minivan was heading westbound in the eastbound lanes of I-94 when it hit an eastbound vehicle.

This led to a chain reaction crash involving an SUV and semi tractor and trailer driven by Cameron

Hazzard. Nicholas Hazzard, Cameron's brother, says Cameron's truck was upside down in the ditch.

"Hanging in his truck, disoriented and scared, he unclipped his seatbelt and dropped from his seat. After a quick search he found and grabbed his travel companion 'Luna', a small Chihuahua, then crawled to safety the best he could with a shattered hip," Nicholas Hazzard said.

Cameron Hazzard laid injured in the ditch for nearly 15 minutes, waving his cell phone as a light, before someone noticed him and came to his aid, Nicholas Hazzard said.

Paramedics arrived on scene and transported Cameron Hazzard by ambulance to a hospital in nearby Tomah, Wisconsin. He was later airlifted to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

Crash / See page 3

Sheriff Deringer: Monticello should increase deputy hours in 2023

BY JEFFREY HAGE
MONTICELLO TIMES

Monticello's population is growing, and so is its need for police services.

That's the word from Wright County Sheriff Sean Deringer, who met with the Monticello City Council Monday, Oct. 11 to pitch the idea of modifying its contract for police services.

October 2021 marks the 50th year that Monticello has contracted with the Wright County Sheriff's Office for policing services, according to 1971 issues of the Monticello Times.

Deringer compared costs of seven area cities similar to Monticello in population that operate their own police depart-

ments.

According to Deringer, the average annual cost of police services in Big Lake, Rogers, North Mankato, Brainerd, New Ulm, North St. Paul and Sauk Rapids is \$242.68 per city resident. In Monticello, where the Wright County Sheriff's Office provides services, allowing Monticello to cut overhead, the annual cost per resident is \$110.39. Deringer noted that Monticello's population is in a growth spurt, and commercial businesses continue to grow and thrive.

"While that is a good thing," Deringer said. "It also brings about challenges for law enforcement."

Monticello currently contracts with the sheriff's office for 52 hours of polic-

ing services each day.

He is recommending to the Monticello City Council that the number be increased eight hours, to 60 hours per day starting January 1, 2023.

Deringer said there is a current situation where deputies are so busy that their calls for service stack up. Sometimes their work load is three calls deep at any given time, Deringer said. Some minor calls don't get the full attention they deserve because of the back load, he said.

To hit the point home ever further, Deringer noted that 1,130 times in the past 12 months, a deputy not assigned to Monticello had to be called into the city to respond to a call.

That is why Monticello could use a fu-

ture increase in deputy hours each day.

Deringer is also recommending Otsego, Delano, St. Michael, Albertville also increase their services.

Deringer noted that there are also two detectives assigned to cover Monticello cases. They handle the cases that are generated from the calls for service deputies respond to.

Monticello Mayor Lloyd Hilgart said like other city services that have cost increases, it is unrealistic to think there would not be a need to increase expenditures for law enforcement. Hilgart told Deringer the city would try to have an answer about increasing service by late winter so Deringer can budget accordingly.

CLAYTONS APPLIANCE REPAIR
CLAYTON'S HEATING & AIR
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Monticello, Minn. 55362
Office: 763-295-3131



Investigation: Sherburne County Sheriff's Office begins investigation, hands it off to BCA investigators

Continued from page 1

tween the two chiefs.

Scharf told investigators that the friction hit its peak following an April 2019 fire on the city's south side in which two children died.

Scharf stated that he criticized the fire department after the fire. He said the fire department exhibited poor turnout and poor performance.

According to Scharf, Halverson didn't take well to comments made during a debriefing after the fire.

"That fire was kind of like the point where my ability to get along with (Halverson) ended," Scharf told BCA investigators.

Scharf stated that the fire debriefing also served as an end to the two departments being able to communicate.

"Kenny's real good at working two sides against each other," Scharf added.

By January 2020, Halverson was removed as fire chief by a joint powers board of Big Lake Township and City of Big Lake officials.

Scharf told investigators that on the night of Halverson's removal, Halverson accused Scharf, new fire chief Seth Hansen (then a member of the city council), Mike Wallen (then mayor of Big Lake), and city administrator Clay Wilfahrt of being out for his job and trying to run him out of town.

Halverson, who was weeks away from his 30th anniversary as a member of the Big Lake Fire Department, was allowed to remain a member of the fire department despite initial talks by the board to expel Halverson from the department completely.

However, Halverson retired as a firefighter in March 2020.

By early summer, Halverson was talking about running for the city council seat held by Rose Johnson, a member of the joint powers committee that voted to remove Halverson as fire chief. But the election turned to a special election when Johnson unexpectedly died in late July 2020.

Scharf told investigators that once Halverson filed as a candidate for the city council seat, "We started hearing back from people about his agenda, which was to get rid of everybody that he feels wronged him during his tenure as chief."

Halverson shared with investigators another side of the story.

According to Halverson, people in the community were telling him that Scharf was making disparaging statements about Halverson's candidacy at community events. Halverson also alleged that a council member and a handful of firefighters were using Big Lake Facebook forums to disparage him in the weeks prior to the November 3, 2020 election.

The "smear campaign" worsened in the week prior to the election, Halverson contended, and those sending out the mailers and hosting the website were doing so anonymously.

Anonymous materials lead to complaint, link to Scharf

Halverson made a complaint to the sheriff's office because he believed election laws were being violated, specifically the requirement that the name and address of the person or committee pre-

paring the materials be included on the election materials. Halverson told investigators he believed people were tampering with the election.

Had there been a violation of the state's election law? The Sherburne County Sheriff's Office appeared willing to at least consider the possibility.

Sherburne County investigators stated looking into the www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com. What investigators found would result in the department handing the investigation over to the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

The tangled web that linked Scharf to the website www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com began to unwind two days after Ken Halverson defeated Ketti Green in a Nov. 3, 2020, special election for a seat on the Big Lake City Council vacated by the July 2020 unexpected death of Rose Johnson.

Sherburne County Sheriff's Office investigators were assigned a case alleging false political and campaign materials had been distributed during the election. Halverson told investigators he wanted a full investigation and charges pressed against those who orchestrated what was referred to in a sheriff's office incident report as "smearing Halverson and directing individuals to access the website."

The website www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com had been taken down by the time Sherburne County Sheriff's Office investigators began looking into the alleged smear campaign. However, the firm hosting the site was known.

The company hosting www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com was hostinger.com, a company operated by Hostinger International, Ltd. Investigators stated that the company is based out of Lanarce, Cyprus, located off the coast of Lebanon. A web search for Hostinger also shows that the company has operations in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Hostinger stated it needed an incident report or a subpoena in order to provide information about the web hosting account. Investigators complied. On Nov. 11, 2020, investigators received information from Hostinger's legal department stating that the account was opened on September 27, 2020 by "Joel scharf Broden" using an email address of brodenhl@protonmail.com.

A static IP address used to log into the control panel of the web hosting site was linked to Charter Communications. Payment for the site was made to Hostinger through an online payment company called Paddle.com.

Investigators contacted the risk and compliance team at Paddle.com in order to obtain information about payment through Paddle to Hostinger for www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com.

There were two purchases, according to the Paddle team: One for \$25.15 on Oct. 6, 2020, and a second payment of \$11.95 on Oct. 26, 2020. The purchases were made on two different credit cards listed to Joel Scharf, investigation reports state.

Investigators then subpoenaed Charter Communications and Verizon for information related to the IP address garnered from the Hostinger account. Verizon indicated that a specific phone

number would be required to determine if it had utilized the IP address using a phone-based web browser. On Nov. 13, 2020, an investigator with the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office provided Verizon with a known cellular phone number for Joel Scharf.

An investigator was immediately told by Verizon that the cell number provided was the phone number that accessed the IP address in question, investigation reports from the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office state.

On Dec. 1, 2020, the results of the Charter subpoena were received. The subscriber information for the IP address in question- the same IP address used to sign up for and create the website www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com- showed that the IP address belonged to Joel Scharf.

Because of the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office's relation with the Big Lake Police Department and Joel Scharf in the role as the department's chief, the investigator was directed to cease his investigation.

BCA assumes role in investigation

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension agreed to take on the investigation.

Two BCA investigators visited the home of Ken and Julie Halverson and interviewed the couple on Dec. 18, 2020.

Halverson suggested that Scharf, a city council member and two members of the fire department could be behind the "smear campaign" launched against during the election campaign season. Scharf and firefighter Ryan Hanson were later interviewed by BCA agents. So was Assistant Police Chief Matt Hayden and Big Lake City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt.

Scharf interviewed by BCA

On the afternoon of Jan. 7, 2021, two investigators from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) interviewed Big Lake Police Chief Joel Scharf for over 30 minutes in Scharf's Big Lake office. It was a cordial conversation that centered around Halverson's history with the fire department and removal as fire chief, Halverson's filing for office and the election itself.

The temperature in the room changed when investigators suggested that Scharf had played a role in the alleged smear campaign against Halverson in an effort to thwart Halverson's efforts of being elected to the Big Lake City Council.

Investigators outrightly asked Scharf what role, if any, he had in the election.

"I'm not having any part of it," Scharf said in response to the investigator's line of questioning.

Scharf denied suggestions from the investigators that he had a role in tampering with the election. He specifically denied involvement in creating the website www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com. He also denied obtaining a web domain through Hostinger.

"I sit in a position where I work at the will of the council and I'm certainly smart enough to stay out of an election, I can tell you that," Scharf told the investigators.

However, the investigators already had

in their possession the results of multiple subpoenas linking www.knowyourfactsbiglake.com to the chief's personal at-home IP address.

Scharf asked the investigators if they were accusing him of being involved in the smear campaign against Halverson. The investigators responded that the record states he paid for the domain and the domain hosting. They added that the domain was accessed from inside the Scharf home and from Scharf's personal cell phone.

Scharf responded, "Well, I'll be honest with you, I think right now I don't want to discuss this any further. It's 'cause I'm kind of overwhelmed with everything you're talking about right now."

Transcripts of the interview show that investigators next asked Scharf, "Um, do you deny that you have any involvement in what I just talked about?"

Scharf responded, "It's like I said, I'm not going to talk about it any further, I think."

Scharf confides in deputy chief

On the afternoon of Jan. 7, 2021, after investigators from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) interviewed Scharf for over 30 minutes in Scharf's Big Lake office, Scharf called Deputy Chief Matt Hayden into his office.

Scharf told Hayden than an election-time website containing disparaging facts about city council candidate Ken Halverson and his time as Big Lake fire chief had been linked to the IP address at Scharf's home, Hayden told those same investigators four weeks later on Feb. 4, 2021 at the BCA field office in St. Cloud.

Scharf then said he was going to have to retire because of the allegations, Hayden told BCA investigators.

Less than a week after the BCA agents visited Scharf at the Big Lake police station, the end of Scharf's three-decade career in law enforcement was in sight.

By Feb. 3, Hayden was already serving as acting chief of the Big Lake Police Department, according to BCA investigation reports. Hayden was formally appointed as acting police chief during the March 10 meeting of the Big Lake City Council, according to minutes of the Big Lake City Council. Scharf tendered his resignation as Big Lake Police Chief on April 23. The Big Lake City Council accepted the resignation at its meeting on Wednesday, April 28. Scharf's last day serving the city of Big Lake was Thursday, May 27.

Scharf worked Friday, Jan. 8, and partial days on Monday, Jan. 11 and Tuesday, Jan. 12, Hayden told BCA investigators. Scharf then took the rest of the week off, Hayden said.

In the Feb. 4 interview with BCA investigators, Hayden said about Scharf's comments about retiring and taking time off, "I took it as there's something that he wants to get away from. I mean, that he wants to run from."

Coincidentally, Scharf's home at 18537 Arctic Drive in Big Lake was put on the market on Wednesday, Jan. 13 according to real estate records obtained by the

Investigation / See page 9

OSSEO HOUSE ACCOUNT
Business Spotlight
1174798
6 x 8 in

Investigation: County attorney declines charges

Continued from page 8

Monticello Times. Jan. 13, was the first day that week that Hayden stated Scharf took a full day off. The house at 18537 Arctic Circle is the same residence that the IP address linked to the anti-Halverson website was associated with. A pending sale of the home was recorded a week later on January 20. The sale closed on February 12. Scharf resided briefly in Otsego after the sale of his home. He has since relocated to Arizona and is working in private security, according to posts on Scharf's personal Facebook page.

No proof beyond a reasonable doubt

On Jan. 7, Joel Scharf and Matt Hayden discussed the day's visit by the BCA agents to Scharf's Big Lake office.

Scharf said one thing that stood out to Hayden, Hayden told investigators.

Scharf didn't make any admissions or acknowledgments of any involvement in the alleged smear campaign, transcripts state.

But Hayden told investigators this: "The only thing that he remotely said is that it'd be hard for them to prove who was actually at the computer."

"And he said it could have been anybody, could have been his wife, Sarah. So he didn't admit saying it was him, anything like that, he just said they're going to have a hard time proving who it was," Hayden told investigators.

That ended up being the case, and the basis behind the Isanti County Attorney's Office declining to file charges in the case.

In its legal analysis of the investigation against Scharf, the Isanti County Sheriff's Office stated that it cannot prove

beyond a reasonable doubt that Scharf sent the mailers and created the website in violation of the Fair Campaign Practices Act.

"We have no evidence that links him to the mailers, and while the website is undeniably linked to his (and his wife's) personal information, there is no evidence that concretely establishes he created and published the website," the Isanti County Attorney's office wrote in its summary.

"There is circumstantial evidence that links him, or at least his information, namely the IP address and payment information, but that evidence is likely insufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt he was the individual who created the site," the county attorney's office continues. "Anyone could have used his computer to create the site or used his financial cards to pay for it, including his wife or other family members in the household."

The county attorney's office stated that "the evidence surrounding Scharf is certainly suspicious, but we need more than suspicion and speculation- we need proof beyond a reasonable doubt, which we do not have."

The Isanti County Attorney's Office stated that even though it would not be prosecuting Scharf, its decision did not preclude Ken Halverson from pursuing civil or administrative procedures or remedies through civil court or the Office of Administrative Hearings, which is Minnesota's centralized administrative court.

Reach Jeff Hage at jeff.hage@apgecm.com

PA at B-Dubs



Photo by Jeff Hage / Monticello Times

Minnesota Vikings play-by-play announcer and KFAN Radio host Paul Allen broadcast his Friday, Oct. 8 radio show live from Buffalo Wild Wings in Monticello. The restaurant was completely full of fans dressed in Vikings purple who made their way to Monticello for the event. Paul Allen's radio show airs Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon on KFAN, found at 100.2 on the FM dial.

Chief: Council was to appoint Olson Wednesday

Continued from page 1

Big Lake Police Department from early February to mid-July after former chief Joel Scharf went on medical leave. Scharf eventually resigned. His last day as chief was May 27.

The Big Lake City Council appointed Hayden as chief on Wednesday, July 14. Olson, who is now acting chief, also interviewed for the chief's position.

On the consent agenda of the August 25 city council meeting, the city council was being asked by Hayden to approve a voluntary reassignment of Olson from sergeant to patrol office. The request appeared to be centered around a change

in scheduling that would have changed Olson's work hours from working mainly days to working evenings, according to the request included in the August 25 city council packet.

With Sam Olson's reassignment as a patrol officer, Hayden stated in his request to the city council that he would be looking to fill the open patrol sergeant position.

However, the request was pulled from the consent agenda during the August 25 city council meeting and was not voted on.

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ANOKA HOUSE ACCOUNT
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Online Contest Hunting
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