



# Douglas County Finance Department is Recognized for Excellence

By James Anderson



Front row, from left: Accounting Supervisor Joan Finckler and Finance Director Candy Anderson. Second row: Accounts Payable Clerk Juliana Polson and Assistant Finance Director Tracy Ruppe. Back row: Interim County Administrator Ann Doucette, Payroll Accountant Renee Middleton and Accounting Supervisor Judy O'Brien.

**W**hen the Douglas County Board of Supervisors meets in October each year to approve the final budget for the next fiscal year, most people don't realize all of the work and time that went into preparing the document.

Preparation of the budget is led by the Douglas County administrator, chairperson, Administration Committee and the Finance Department. The Finance Department begins the year by closing out the previous year's budget, which will run through late spring. Then the department jumps immediately into preparing documents and research for the next fiscal year.

The Douglas County budget represents more than 27 departments with a total annual budget of nearly \$54 million in expenditures. "Douglas County has one of the finest finance departments in the state of Wisconsin," said Interim County Administrator Ann Doucette. "The department has won multiple awards for both financial reporting and budgeting that are traditionally given to the larger Wisconsin counties with an abundance of staff. Our county is very fortunate to have very dedicated employees that exemplify outstanding financial management of its resources."

One of the greatest challenges that the Finance Department has is packaging the budget in a way that meets government accounting standards yet is also accessible and easy to read by both elected officials and citizens. The budget is designed to be a transparent communications tool that supports an element of the county's strategic priorities: to provide cost-effective services with equal access to all

citizens; to continue and enhance partnerships; and to responsibly manage our resources and plan for the future.

City of Superior Mayor Jim Paine reflected on his service on the Douglas County Board of Supervisors as well as the budget process. "That process started with basic fiscal responsibility and efficiency. It finished with values and transparency," he said. Paine also noted that transparency is supported by how a budget is presented and how he worked to ensure that transparency for the City of Superior.


"The transparency is perhaps what I am most proud of; the city budget is now a readable document. It was important to me to provide every citizen – but especially those concerned with our finances – with a document that they could easily read, understand and criticize," said Paine. "It is a key factor in making government more accessible and accountable to citizens."

To recognize its high-quality work, the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) awarded the Douglas County

Finance Department the GFOA Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting in 2018. Even more impressive, this represents the 23rd consecutive year that Douglas County has received the award. By year-end 2015 (the last year for which data were available) the GFOA had awarded this honor to 4,231 organizations. Of those, 61 were in Wisconsin and 18 of them were counties.

Douglas County has also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the 2017 adopted budget document, which represents the 10th time the county has received this award. The GFOA awarded 773 governments with the Budget Presentation Award for fiscal years beginning in January 2017. The award was presented to 35 jurisdictions in Wisconsin, 10 of which are counties.

"These awards are a testament to the dedication at all levels within Douglas County, the County Board chair and Board of Supervisors for providing cohesive leadership and setting sound fiscal policies, and the county administrator for taking that framework, set by the County Board, and providing the leadership to work within it," said Candace Anderson, director of finance for Douglas County.

The impetus to submit the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and the adopted budget to the GFOA began with Doucette. Her leadership and that of Brenda Ostrander, who has since retired, has set a high benchmark for the Finance Department to follow and build upon. The current Finance Department staff has a combined 87 years of experience and is currently working on the 2017 CAFR. 



# UW-EXTENSION UPDATE

Over the last two-years, University of Wisconsin-Extension has been progressing through a reorganization called nEXT Generation. While the previous biennial state budget was the impetus for this initiative, nEXT Generation was designed in large part to make UW-Extension more relevant, efficient and responsive to state and local needs.

Cooperative Extension has implemented much of its nEXT Generation plan. Program areas have been organized into five departments: Agriculture; Natural Resources; Community Development; Health and Well-Being; Human Development and Relationships; and Positive Youth Development. In addition, Cooperative Extension has succeeded in the core goal of maintaining a presence in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties. This new program alignment and geographic distribution of staff will ensure interdisciplinary work and programming tailored to local needs.



Cooperative Extension Dean Karl Martin (far left) at the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve ribbon-cutting celebration at Barker's Island in Superior.

pendent campus. At the time, this allowed UW-Extension to grow, diversify its program areas and connect with Wisconsin citizens in innovative ways.

Today, a return to UW-Madison will allow Extension's applied, research-backed programming to work seamlessly with Wisconsin's premier research institution. "We already have a large investment in partner colleges and schools at UW-Madison," said Karl Martin, dean and director of Cooperative Extension. "This move will allow us to better engage with the broad spectrum of disciplines of our world-class land grant institution that generates over a billion dollars in research grants annually."

## EXTENSION FOCUSES ON WISCONSIN'S NEEDS

In January 2018, Martin announced that he was forming two task forces to evaluate emerging issues affecting Wisconsin and determine how Cooperative Extension can best engage with these issues. The first task force will examine the opioid addiction crisis and determine potential programming and other ways Cooperative Extension could support local communities. The second task force will examine community and workforce development impacts related to significant economic development announcements such as Foxconn in southeast Wisconsin.

"At a time when Wisconsin is experiencing significant pressures from the nationwide opioid crisis and opportunities in the form of Foxconn's move to our state, Cooperative Extension must engage in our unique role as facilitator among local grassroots partners and University of Wisconsin resources," Martin said. "We must bring stakeholders together to address these and other emerging issues that impact our citizens, families and communities."

## COOPERATIVE EXTENSION RETURNS HOME

On October 10, 2017, UW System President Ray Cross announced significant changes to the structure of the University of Wisconsin System. This restructuring will join the 13 two-year campuses with four-year comprehensive and research institutions. Additionally, Cooperative Extension will move to UW-Madison and the Division of Continuing Education, Outreach and E-learning will move to UW System.

In his announcement, Cross cited demographic changes, declining enrollment at two-year colleges and the need to better align research and practice as reasons for this restructuring.

For Cooperative Extension, these changes represent a return home. Cooperative Extension was part of UW-Madison until 1965, when Extension became an institution of its own. Wisconsin was the only state in the nation where Extension occupied its own inde-

## EXTENSION IN DOUGLAS COUNTY

UW-Extension has a strong presence and partnership with Douglas County. Cooperative Extension is housed in the Douglas County Courthouse and offers the full range of Extension programming. Douglas County hosts educators focused on agriculture, youth and families, 4-H, community and economic development and nutrition educators through the Food Wise program. In addition, the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve, located on Barker's Island, is an Extension program. [P3](#)



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