



DELEGATION GEARS UP FOR THE 33RD ANNUAL SUPERIOR DAYS

By James Anderson III

On February 20 and 21, about 150 adults and youth from the region will travel to Madison for the 33rd year to participate in Superior Days. As the delegation prepares for this annual event, it seems like a good time to reflect on how it all started as well as some of the past and recent accomplishments.

In 1986, an ad hoc group – armed with a series of requests to support economic growth in Superior and Northwestern Wisconsin based on the findings of the economic analysis – traveled to Madison to tell their story and request action. Superior Days was born – the first-ever community and regional citizens grassroots lobbying effort in Wisconsin. In fact, other communities across Wisconsin

and Minnesota, including Duluth, would use the Superior Days model to begin their own grassroots advocacy efforts.



32nd Superior Days delegation

MEETING THE THREE-PART ACID TEST

Since its inception, Superior Days has emphasized that citizens drive the lobbying agenda. Community meetings are held to help plan for each Superior Days event, where interested citizens come together to share their ideas on issues to bring to the Legislature and state agencies. Superior Days issues should meet a three-part acid test: 1) the issue is unique to Northwest Wisconsin; 2) the issue needs resources that exceed local capability to address; and 3) the issue has wide community consensus and agreement.

Since that first visit in 1986 until now, Superior Days has helped to facilitate change in Northwestern Wisconsin. The most significant success was the completion of Highway 53 into a four-lane expressway. However, many may not realize the role that Superior Days played in other areas, including: estab-

FOUNDING OF SUPERIOR DAYS

The need for Superior Days became apparent in the early 1980s, when the United States was going through an economic recession. The Twin Ports area was disproportionately hit by this recession and recovered much more slowly than the rest of the nation. Superior lost 20 percent of its employment base, which included a 40 percent reduction in manufacturing jobs.

The community took time to analyze what was working well and what wasn't in the local economy with the assistance of University of Wisconsin-Extension. With a community economic analysis in hand, the community knew that change was needed. However, Superior felt far away and disenfranchised from the political process in Madison. This was a time long before cell phones and the internet, calling Madison was a long-distance phone call and the drive to Madison was largely on two-lane roads.

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lishment of the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve (The Reserve) and the Lake Superior Research Institute, both located in Superior; establishment of the Northern Great Lakes Visitors Center, located just outside of Ashland on the northern edge of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest; and funding for buildings on the campus of UW-Superior, KUWS Radio and the Veterans Out-patient Clinic on Tower Avenue.



2017 SUCCESS: NEXT-GENERATION 911 AND MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT

As important as it is to ask for policy or legislative changes to positively impact Northwestern Wisconsin, it's equally important to thank the Legislature and agencies when they respond to requests. In 2017, the delegation achieved legislative and agency success with two issues that were part of the full Superior Days agenda: funding for a next-generation 911 system and changes to Medicare reimbursement rates for outpatient care to address mental health and addiction services.

Next-generation 911 funding: The 2017 biennial budget, passed last fall in the Wisconsin Legislature, included \$6.7 million in funding to provide a Statewide Emergency Services Network for E911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in Wisconsin. This new digital NG (next generation) E911 network will allow PSAPs to receive text messaging, photos and accommodate new technology as it emerges in addition to wireless and landline calls currently received. This added capability will allow the public to send additional critical information to PSAPs from any device, in various formats, to aid in dispatching the appropriate emergency services.

This statewide network will allow all PSAPs to operate on a level playing field and provide a statewide contract, so each PSAP will not have to go it alone with contract negotiations. PSAPs will be able to transfer calls and back each other up during emergencies. As technology advances and location information improves, the network will be able to carry the enhanced data information to aid dispatchers locating those needing assistance. Ultimately, the changes that will be implemented in NG E911 will be focused on responding to calls for emergency services faster and more accurately than currently possible.

The legislation enacted in the 2017 Budget Act also included the implementation of a governor-appointed 911 committee, which will make recommendations to the State Interoperability Council. Their recommendations will help establish standards for NG E911, the operation of PSAPs, the qualifications required to be a dispatcher and standards for equipment. In addition, it will make Wisconsin eligible for federal E911 grants, which may help pay the costs to upgrade 911 equipment and train dispatchers. The action taken in the budget bill is the starting point that will bring Wisconsin in line with other states concerning the operation of E911.

Douglas County is well prepared to implement the NG E911. According to Keith Kesler, Douglas County director of emergency

management, the county has already invested in digital-compatible equipment capable of accepting NG E911 information. The county is just waiting for the needed changes at the state, and the basic infrastructure that supports NG E911 to turn on and utilize these new digital features.

Increased Medicaid rates for outpatient care: In October 2017, Gov. Scott Walker announced that Medicaid reimbursement rates for outpatient services related to mental health and addiction treatment would be increasing in Wisconsin. Walker stated that the total investment in increased reimbursements would be about \$17 million, which included \$7 million in funding from the State of Wisconsin. According to the governor's press release, "Effective January 1, 2018, Wisconsin Medicaid will increase reimbursement for outpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment."

Why is this important? Outpatient treatment in Northwestern Wisconsin has been a challenge, since most of the treatment occurs in Minnesota. Minnesota Medicaid reimbursement rates are significantly higher than Wisconsin's, which can make it difficult to find care for persons afflicted with addiction or mental health issues. How disparate are the reimbursement rates? According to research from the Douglas County Department of Health and Human Services, three common services were examined: diagnostic assessments - Wisconsin reimburses 36 percent of what Minnesota reimburses; individual therapy - Wisconsin reimburses 56 percent of what Minnesota reimburses; evaluation and medication management - Wisconsin reimburses 53 percent of what Minnesota reimburses.

The rapid spread of opioids and their addictive nature has had a devastating effect of Wisconsin, including Northwest Wisconsin. According to Gov. Walker's press release, 827 people died in Wisconsin in 2016 from opioid overdose deaths. By late 2017, Douglas County had experienced 10 deaths directly related to opioids and other controlled substances, according to the medical examiner. Deaths related to prescription opioids increased 600 percent between 2000 and 2016. Northwestern Wisconsin is not immune from these trends. Time will tell if these higher outpatient reimbursement rates are enough to increase access for citizens in Northwest Wisconsin seeking treatment from providers in Minnesota. But these changes are certainly a step in the right direction. [P.3](#)



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