



DOUGLAS COUNTY PREPARES FOR SUPERIOR DAYS IN MADISON

By James Anderson



The annual Superior Days event will be held February 12 and 13 in Madison – the 34th time citizens from Northwest Wisconsin will travel to the Capitol to advocate for legislative and public policy changes to positively impact the region.

Superior Days is the oldest community grassroots lobbying event in the state of Wisconsin. Many similar programs developed over the years use Superior Days as the model, including Duluth & St. Louis County at the Capitol and the Chippewa Valley Rally.

What makes Superior Days unique compared to many similar programs is that the community comes together to identify the legislative and agency lobbying agenda. In November 2018, about 60 community members from throughout the region came together to identify issues that are impacting the region, based on a three-part test: the issue is unique to the region or disproportionately impacts the area; there is widespread consensus for the issue; and resolution exceeds local capacity to address the issue.

This year, about 160 adults and youth from Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland and Iron Counties will lead the delegation. There are four legislative issues in 2019, although they are being presented as three:

Medicaid funding for youth and adults: This issue is a three-legged stool that encompasses: behavioral health reimbursement rates, nursing home reimbursement rates, and personal caregiver reimbursement rates and the resulting extremely low wages.

Joint economic development tools: Better City Superior, support placing authorizing language in the new biennial budget; ½ percent local option sales tax for roads.

Funding for higher education: Support UW-System request, which provides an additional \$2.68 million for UW-Superior.

Delegates will work in teams of 3-5 members and will make personal visits to every legislator in the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate. Each legislative issue will be discussed with legislators. Lobbyists include over 40 high school students from across the region and nine UW-Superior Student Government Association delegates. Following is more detail about each issue:

Medicaid funding: Our proximity to Duluth, which is also the hub for medical services in our region, is very problematic for Medicaid recipients. Minnesota Medicaid reimbursement rates come close to twice the rate of Wisconsin, which often limits access to Wisconsin residents. This is especially problematic for residents who are experiencing a crisis related to a behavioral health issue. Our aging population is also starting to challenge medical services for seniors, especially nursing homes. Wisconsin nursing homes lose over \$58 per day for each Medicaid patient that they serve. Finally, the shift to keep people in their homes as long as possible has stretched the resources of personal caregivers. These are often the lowest paid positions in the medical field, yet there is a growing demand. Lobby teams will seek greater equity between Wisconsin and Minnesota Medicaid reimbursement rates.

Economic development: A common refrain heard in Superior, “Duluth can do...,” why can’t we?” Wisconsin limits local taxation; therefore, tourism and road sales tax generation in Minnesota is not allowed without the permission of the Wisconsin Legislature and governor. The delegation is seeking authority to seek local

referendum votes for a ½ percent sales tax for local and county roads, as well as a tourism and services tax for an exposition district that would fund mixed-use development in the city of Superior.


Support for UW System budget request: University of Wisconsin-Superior is the smallest of the UW System schools and has been disproportionately impacted by budget cuts over the last decade or more. UW-Superior has needed to cut programs and struggles to offer competitive compensation for higher education jobs in the Twin Ports market and beyond. Therefore, the delegation will support the UW System budget request, which will offer \$2.68 million for UW-Superior.

Delegates will also meet with agency secretaries and staff to discuss issues that might be resolved or addressed without legislative changes. A variety of agency issues will be discussed, including:

- Costs related to child protective services (CPS), which are adversely impacting county budgets across the state of Wisconsin.
- A variety of issues concerning transportation with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will be engaged on hunting, campground reservation systems and other public policy issues.

Superior Days is also a time for delegates, adult and youth to network in a less formal setting. The Superior Days Reception and Best of Wisconsin's Northwest will be held the evening of February 12 at the Madison Concourse Hotel. It will feature about 25 area businesses and organizations with displays, a Wisconsin-style dinner and an opportunity to mingle between delegates, elected officials, and staff from agencies and the legislature. Meanwhile, the youth delegation will be holding a banquet of their own featuring a prominent speaker from Madison.

If you are interested in learning more about or attending Superior Days, visit www.SuperiorDays.com or call UW-Extension at (715) 395-1363. 

DOUGLAS COUNTY STAFF: New Faces and Promotions



Wendy Bong




Zach DeVoe



Rebecca Severson

In late 2018, the Douglas County Board of Supervisors welcomed Wendy Bong, who was appointed to fill a District 2 vacancy created by the resignation of Terry White. Meanwhile, three employees moved into new leadership roles in the county. In July, County Zoning Administrator Steve Rannenberg retired from Douglas County. This started a six-month restructuring process, and in 2019 the office is now called Land Services. Zach DeVoe is the land ser-



vices director and Keith Wiley is the zoning coordinator. In the child support office, Rebecca Severson was promoted to the role of child support administrator on January 1. 

James Anderson III is the community and economic development educator for UW-Extension.