

BLUE EARTH COUNTY COMMUNICATOR

Effectively & Efficiently Delivering Essential Services



FALL/WINTER 2019

New Technology Makes Drug Testing Easier

The eye-scan technology tests the reactivity of the retina to determine drug use.

Drug and alcohol abuse is a significant contributing factor in why individuals become involved with the criminal justice system. Offenses range from theft and burglary to intoxicated driving and assaults. Probation Officers work with clients to address their substance abuse through education, treatment, and counseling with the goal that they will change their behaviors. This programming is critical to effecting long-term change, but compliance through drug and alcohol testing is also an important part of the process.

Historically, Probation Officers have used breath and urine testing to detect and deter continued use, but with the introduction of new eye-scan technology in July, these techniques have become the second defense.

Eye-scan technology, also known as ocular scanning, detects if someone is under the influence by a scan of the retina, the back lining inside the eye that senses light and allows you to see. The device works by comparing the reactivity of the retina against a baseline scan in which no drugs were taken. If the scan indicates the potential use of a substance, a follow-up urine test is done to verify results and determine if substance use has occurred. Initial results from the County and other Minnesota counties using the technology have proven the device to be largely accurate.

The introduction of the eye scan device has also resulted in a significant decrease of urine collection. In 2018, approximately 10,000 urine tests were completed by the County's Community Corrections department. Data indicates urine collection could be cut by over half, and because urine testing requires same-sex collection, staff are able to be more efficient due to the minimal staffing required for the scan.

Accountability through drug testing, paired with education and treatment, help us to achieve client success and support productive citizens within our community.

The Ponderosa Landfill Goes Green

The landfill moves towards a greener future with two environmentally-friendly initiatives.

In June, the switch was flipped on a 40-kilowatt solar array on the roof of the Customer Service Center, which was constructed in 2016. The display features 134 solar panels and will decrease the landfill's carbon footprint and reduce its overall impact on the environment. The renewable energy source, which sends its generated power back to the grid, will reduce both carbon emissions and power costs over the long-term.

The second initiative included a large 22.7-acre piece of the landfill's property that was planted with native grasses on the bluff overlooking the landfill. This land will now provide many conservation benefits such as protecting erodible soils, improving water quality, enhancing wildlife populations, and providing pollinator forage habitats.

Visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/ponderosa to learn more about the Ponderosa Landfill, accepted items, and a look at the solar display's real-time performance.



www.blueearthcountymn.gov

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with Blue Earth County

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or by submitting your comment online at
www.blueearthcountymn.gov/connect

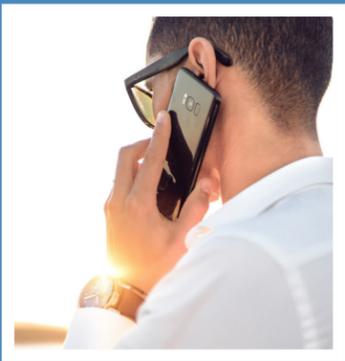
Keeping Your Personal Information Secure

Avoid Being Spoofed by Scammers by Following Tips from the FCC

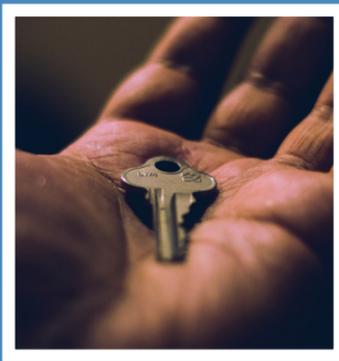
At the beginning of August, the Sheriff's Office received a handful of reports from the public regarding fraudulent phone calls. The caller claimed to be a member of the Sheriff's Office telling citizens that they needed to pay money to avoid trouble for a missed court date. Their caller ID appeared to show a legitimate Sheriff's Office phone number. Fortunately, no one reported losing any money in this round of calls.

Although technology makes some aspects of our lives easier, it can also provide new opportunities for criminals. Numerous websites and phone applications now exist allowing people to "spoof" or change the number that shows up on a caller ID. Spoofing adds legitimacy to scam calls that often originate in another state or country, which is done intentionally to complicate criminal investigation and prosecution.

Phone scams are common and new variations and twists occur frequently. So what can you do to avoid spoofing scams? According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC):



Don't answer phone calls from unknown numbers.



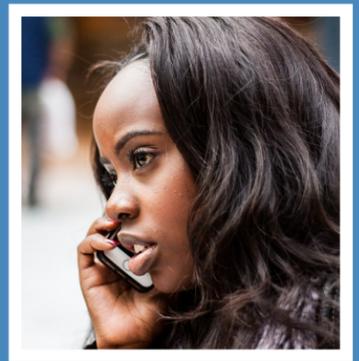
Never give out personal information such as account numbers, social security numbers or passwords.



Use extreme caution if you are being pressured for immediate payment.



Never assume an unexpected call is legitimate. Hang up and call back using a number you can verify on a bill, a statement, or an official website.



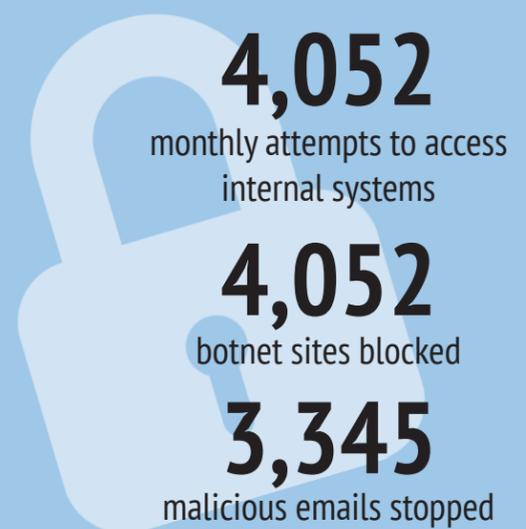
If you answer and it's not who you expected, don't hang on, hang up.

For additional information, tips to avoid being spoofed, web resources and to learn more, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at fcc.gov/consumers

How We're Protecting Your Most Important Information

Held every October, National Cybersecurity Awareness Month is a collaborative effort between government and industry to raise awareness about the importance of cybersecurity. It's important that all Americans have the resources they need to be safer and more secure online. Hackers and scammers from around the world pose a threat to online data. At the County, we recognize the threats and do everything we can to keep your data safe. In a single month over the Summer, the County had 4,052 attempted logins from outside the US to just one of our internal systems. There were also 3,345 malicious emails caught and 1,505 blocked botnet sites, which can infect a computer and allow an attacker to access the device.

Staff is also trained on the latest cybersecurity awareness techniques, including the warning signs of suspicious emails, phishing scams, and untrustworthy websites. All employees complete cybersecurity training upon hire and again every other year with additional assigned courses for those working with the most sensitive information.



Truancy Program Expands its Reach

In 2016, the Blue Earth County Attorney's Office and all the school districts in the County implemented the Truancy Intervention Program. In March 2019, based upon the success of the Truancy Intervention Program and in collaboration with Blue Earth County Community Corrections, the County implemented a Student Attendance Review Team (SART) as a pilot program in partnership with Mankato Area Public Schools (ISD 77). The SART program, an enhancement to the truancy diversion initiative, is designed to coordinate truancy programming and services through interagency and community cooperation. This spring, SART was implemented at all ISD 77 middle schools and high schools. The County is currently working with all school districts within Blue Earth County to expand the SART program in the 2019-2020 school year.

Minnesota law defines a student as a habitual truant when they are absent from school without lawful excuse on seven or more class periods. Once a student qualifies as a habitual truant, the County utilizes a screening process to determine if a student is eligible for SART. The SART team is typically comprised of representatives from the County Attorney's Office, Community Corrections, and the participating school. The team invites the student and parent to enter into an attendance contract and the parties discuss supports and services that can be established to ensure the student's educational success. The SART students participate in weekly meeting with the team to monitor compliance with the attendance contract.

By entering into a voluntary contract without going to Court, not only do children stay out of the Court system, but the County and school districts are able to intervene quickly, effectively and efficiently to deliver the resources necessary to improve school attendance. Truancy is historically one of the biggest predictors of future involvement in the criminal justice system. Statistics shows that high school dropouts are up to eight times more likely to be in jail or prison than someone with a high school diploma.

The County is excited about expanding our partnership with local school districts to address issues of truancy earlier in the school year and work collaboratively to deliver more comprehensive services to students and families. In doing so it is our overall goal to increase high school graduation rates and decrease the number of youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

Stay Alert for Emerald Ash Borer

This year was difficult for many trees, including ash. With nearby Brown, Martin and Scott County infested with emerald ash borer (EAB), Blue Earth County residents need to be on the lookout for this dangerous pest. EAB is very different from many tree insects in that it can kill healthy, well-established ash quickly. Making matters worse, ash trees are extremely common in Blue Earth County.

There are several warning signs for ash borer, but some are better than others for diagnosis. A thin tree canopy,



woodpecker activity, or unusual shoots sprouting lower on the trunk could be signs of EAB infestation. However, these problems are also seen with unrelated diseases or issues.

One unique EAB symptom is the D-shaped exit hole made after the borer emerges from the tree, typically 1/8" of an inch long. However, these holes are often high up and can be difficult to see from ground level. The best signs are distinctive S-shaped tunnels, called galleries, found between splitting bark and outer wood. Other insects can carve patterns too, but only EAB makes that S-shape.

If you suspect EAB on your ash trees, please call the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's "Arrest the Pest" hotline at 1-888-545-6684 or contact Blue Earth County Extension at 507-304-4325.



Renovation Begins on Existing Government Center

A new building addition to the Blue Earth County Government Center, located at 410 S 5th Street in Mankato, opened to the public in July. The building addition opening coincided with the opening of a new 344-stall parking ramp. At the same time, the existing building, except for the License Center and Women Infants and Children (WIC) offices, was closed for demolition and renovation.

The building addition is the home for several Human Services programs, including Financial Assistance, Behavioral Health, Child Support and Mental Health units.

The renovations to the existing Government Center building are set to be completed during the first quarter of 2020 and will house the License Center, Property and Environmental Resources, remaining Human Services units (Adult Services, Child and Family Services, Children's Mental Health, Human Services Administration, Public Health and Supportive Housing), Veterans Services, Finance and Information Technology.

We have created a website with construction updates and photographs, parking maps and department

location maps. To view the site, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/GCProject. Thank you for your patience and understanding through this transition. We are very confident the final project will assist us in effectively and efficiently serving the citizens of Blue Earth County.

License Center Parking

During renovation, License Center customers should utilize convenient 5th Street parking. There is no access to the License Center via the parking ramp.

The Census

Why being counted really matters.

The 2020 Census is rapidly approaching with mailings beginning in March and Census Day on April 1. The accuracy of the Census has far-reaching implications. It's accuracy not only affects the political representation, but how over a half a trillion dollars in federal funds will be distributed to state and local governments.

Funding for programs including SNAP, Highway Planning and Construction, Medicaid, and the US Department of Education's two biggest elementary and secondary programs, all rely on census data. Reasons like this are why being counted is so important. Remember to fill out your Census information and remind your friends, family, and neighbors to do the same.

Hello VTRS

Goodbye MNLARS.

Fast Enterprises, the company that implemented the state's REAL ID system to comply with federal law, was awarded the contract to replace the troubled MNLARS system. The replacement will be a proven system called Vehicle Titling Registration System, also known as VTRS (pronounced VIT-russ). Fast Enterprises, which is based in Colorado, was the only company to submit a proposal for the contract. This however, was most likely due to a bid requirement stating that submitting companies must have set up licensing and registration in at least five states hoping to ensure that the awarded company would prove successful.

VTRS is scheduled to be completed in October 2021 and drivers should expect an easy transition without interruptions or slowdowns to service.

Construction Updates

County Road 1

Completion: November

Project details: The road will be reconstructed from County Road 90 to Gwyn Ave. in Mankato. Gravel surfacing and surcharge will be placed from 193rd St. to 195th St. north of County Road 9 for a future reconstruction project. Traffic is detoured south of County Road 90.

County Road 14

Completion: October

Project details: The road will be reconstructed from MN Hwy 30 to County Road 4. Traffic is detoured.

Rapidan Dam

Completion: October

Project details: The west abutment will be re-surfaced near the powerhouse.

Kern Bridge

Completion: December

Project details: The historic Kern Bridge in Mankato Township will be removed from its current location and salvaged for disassembly and future re-use at a location that has yet to be determined.



Waste Wizard

Have you ever questioned what bin an item you're disposing of belongs in? With Waste Wizard, you'll never again wonder if something is recyclable, re-usable, compostable, or destined for the trash.

Waste Wizard is an online, informational search tool that allows County residents to type in their item and discover proper disposal methods, drop-off facilities and hours, disposal costs, and any special instructions. The tool helps to make proper disposal easier and reduces recycling contamination. It also diverts recyclable, compostable, and reusable materials from going to landfills.

To access the Waste Wizard tool and search for your items, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/ww

Materials by Mail

We're bringing the Library to you!

It's never been easier to order your dinner directly to your door while lounging on the couch in your pajamas. Checking out books from the library should be no different. The Blue Earth County Library will deliver books directly to your door depending on where you live through their Rural Library Service.

The Rural Library Service provides certain residents access to library materials through the US Mail. Residents in Madison Lake, Eagle Lake, St. Clair, Good Thunder, Garden City, Vernon Center, Amboy, and Pemberton are eligible for the Rural Library deliveries.

There are three ways to order.

1. Call the library at (507) 304-4022 and request your items.
2. Visit www.beclibrary.org/materialsbymail and fill out the order form.
3. Visit www.beclibrary.org/catalog, select your materials, and choose "Blue Earth County Library: Rural Library Services" as your pickup location when placing your holds.

Materials will be mailed directly to your home with an enclosed postage-paid return envelope container. When you are done with the material, simply stick it in the return envelope and mail it back to the library.

Rural patrons will also have full access to the regional library system's extensive eBook and audio book collection, which can be downloaded from the County library website www.beclibrary.org/ebooks to their personal reading or listening devices.

For more information, call the Blue Earth County Library at (507) 304-4022.

The Need for Foster Families

Dispelling the misconceptions around fostering.

Foster Care is a protective service to children and their families when families can no longer care for their children. In Minnesota, about 16,500 children and young adults experienced out-of-home care in 2018. There are a variety of reasons and circumstances that result in parents being unable to care for their children, including substance abuse, mental illness, or family crisis.

As of August, the County had 48 licensed foster homes; 20 are providers licensed to care for relatives and 28 are non-related providers. Foster parents play a critical role in providing a nurturing, safe, and loving family during a time of crisis in a child's life. Unfortunately, misconceptions about foster care can prevent a lot of great candidates from providing a home to children in need. The facts below will help dispel many common myths you may have heard about fostering.

Myth	Fact
You need a specific kind of household to be a foster parent.	Foster parents can live in all sorts of homes and apartments and can rent or own. They can be a single person, married, or a same-sex couple. Foster parents are unique just like the kids they foster.
You can't work full-time and be a foster parent.	You don't have to be a stay-at-home parent in order to foster. Programs are available that will pay for childcare while you're at work. While job flexibility is a benefit, it is not a necessity.
You won't have control over which children you foster.	County staff will conduct a home study during the review process. Preferences can be noted for age, gender, number of children, whether you'd be willing to take a sibling group, and the needs or disabilities of a child.
Kids never leave the system and will stay for a long time.	According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 58% of foster children in the state in 2018 were reunited with their birth parents or legal guardians. The length of a child's placement depends on how the parent remedies the situation that resulted in the foster care, but some placements can be as short as a single day. Many of the most successful transitions back into the home happen when foster and biological parents work together.
Foster children are unruly and beyond help.	Kids are resilient, and structure can do a lot of good. All children bring challenges with them, especially during a period of adjustment, but a committed parent can help a child flourish. Oftentimes, seeing a child's growth while in foster care is extremely rewarding.

To learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/fostercare or call (507) 304-4222.

School's Out!

A new program at the Blue Earth County Library in Mankato will be an opportunity for kids to learn and play in a safe environment on days when local schools aren't in session. School age children are invited to visit the Library and use computers, check out materials, play, and attend a fun event. Typically, events will be scheduled for mid-morning and will be free and open to the public. Activities will include STEM projects, music, dancing, yoga, and so much more. Event details can be found in the Library and on their website at www.beclibrary.org



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