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News & Views

February 10, 2025

The City of New Hope's Employee Newsletter

New Mayor Sworn in



On Monday, Jan. 13 at the New Hope City Council meeting, it was the passing of the gavel, as newly elected Mayor John Elder as well as reelected Council Members Andy Hoffe and Mike Isenberg were sworn in. In December 2023, longtime Mayor Kathi Hemken announced that she would not seek reelection after 16 years in office. Elder has served on the Council since 2008, having been appointed to fill a vacant seat and subsequently re-elected.

This is Council Member Hoffe's sixth term and Council Member Isenberg's second.

(Photo Credit: Beth Kramer, communications coordinator)

New Council Member ~ Kyle Coryell

The first order of business in the new year was appointing Kyle Coryell (*pictured with city clerk, Andrea Phinney and wife, Jessi*) to fill the unexpired term resulting from Elder's election as mayor. Council Member Coryell, an alumnus of Robbinsdale Cooper High School and pharmacist by trade, was one of several applicants interviewed by Council in December for the vacant seat. Kyle Coryell is hoping to bring a fresh perspective to the City's issues. "The change is exciting," she told CCX News. "I am a person that's passionate about happy communities leading to happy lives and a happy world that we live in," Coryell said. (Photo Credit: Beth Kramer)



Mark Your Calendar:

Feb. 11-13 - Wellness: Biometric Screening

Feb. 17 - President's Day – City Offices Closed

Feb. 26 - Wacky Wednesday

March 26 - Wacky Wednesday

Employee of the Year

Ricky Plemel, New Hope Golf Course Superintendent

New Hope Golf Course Superintendent Ricky Plemel has been named the City of New Hope's 2024 Employee of the Year. Plemel joined the City in 2023 and quickly made a positive impact by introducing innovative ideas to improve the New Hope Village Golf Course and enhance the golf experience for all who visit the course.

One of Plemel's key accomplishments has been bringing work that was previously outsourced in-house. His mechanical skills have ensured that the golf course equipment, including mowers, tractors, utility vehicles, and riding carts, remains in great condition through meticulous repairs and maintenance.

Plemel also updated the golf course's point-of-sale system to the RecTrac system, ensuring consistency across the Parks and Recreation Department. He conducted research to determine the necessary equipment, placed the orders, learned how to operate the system, and customized it to best meet the needs of the golf course and its staff.

Additionally, he provided training for the seasonal staff and assisted in troubleshooting any system issues that came up. Despite a brief winter with minimal downtime, Ricky had the golf course ready to open by March 1, the earliest in its history. This achievement was particularly impressive given that many seasonal staff had not yet returned. This year, he added irrigation around the putting green using grant funding and managed the installation personally. Additionally, he oversaw the installation of the first paved cart paths on the course. *(Photo credit: Beth Kramer)*



Congratulations, and thank you to the additional nominees!

Jeff Alger, Community Development Specialist

Jeff was nominated for the great job he does not only in community development but how he's always willing and able to assist other departments in researching issues and providing accurate, complete documents. Jeff is responsible for the City's scattered site housing projects. Through this program he's been able to provide the West Metro Fire-Rescue District (WMFRD) many training opportunities, and in October Jeff was recognized by WMFRD with the Fire Chief's Commendation for this. Thank you, Jeff!

Krissy Barthel, Utility Billing Clerk

Krissy was nominated for the outstanding job she does day in and day out in utility billing. Every day she has a smile and good word for her co-workers and for the frequently challenging residents she works with in keeping their utility bills paid. Krissy's day-to-day workload skyrocketed over the past several months as part of the transition to our new software package, still, she continues to provide outstanding customer service and has done a phenomenal job in dealing with and overcoming the many challenges this project has presented. Thanks, Krissy!

Jared Gray, Police Officer

Jared was nominated for the wonderful way he serves the City and its residents as a police officer. He is very compassionate in his interactions with the public, and demonstrates teamwork with his peers and other City employees. Jared is always cognizant of including others and is willing to teach and to learn. He treats everyone with respect, and demonstrates a great work ethic and morals. Thanks, Jared!

Nick Macklem, Stormwater Specialist/Project Specialist

Nick was nominated for the great job he does, particularly the way he interacts respectfully and courteously with residents and business owners surrounding public works and stormwater projects. Nick is the direct point of contact for watershed projects and issues. Recently, representatives of the Meadow Lake Watershed Association shared that Nick is "awesome" to work with. He's always ready to lend a helping hand and serves as a conduit to teach public works everything from stormwater topics to utilizing technology. Thank you, Nick!

Tony Portesan, Recreation Facilities Supervisor

Tony was nominated for the outstanding job he does at the New Hope Aquatic Park and his willingness to help at the ice arena during busy times...even taking his turn on the Zamboni! Tony has been known to come in after hours (even overnight) to make repairs to the pool, so operations are not impacted. He excels as a supervisor and again last summer, many seasonal employees returned to work in the great environment he has created. Thank you, Tony, for everything you do to make the aquatic facility (and the ice arena) so successful!

Shari Rains, Accountant

Shari was nominated for her hard work and dedication in her role as the City's accountant. Shari's role touches all departments and because of her extensive knowledge and her ability to communicate so well, she makes what could be difficult or stressful situations seem simple. She is always willing to help others, shares her knowledge and is simply a joy to be around. Thank you, Shari, for everything you do and especially the way in which you do it!

Jill Smisek, Office Specialist

Jill was nominated for being an all-around great employee. She is a true team player, having significant impacts throughout parks and recreation, however typically doing it all in the background. She constantly does what is best for the department and supports her co-workers always. She is a great representative of the City, always demonstrating her friendliness, professionalism and communication skills. Jill remains calm and patient, even during challenging or hectic times. Thank you, Jill, for being a key member of our team!



Congratulations Graduates!

Community Police Academy – Oct. 22

Congratulations to the 2024 Tri-City Community Police Academy graduates! Over the course of seven weeks, the group made up of citizens from Robbinsdale, Crystal and New Hope learned about investigations, use of force, traffic stops, DWI and drugs, school safety and other police-related topics. Staff had an awesome time teaching and answering questions about why and how they do their job. Pictured is Crime Prevention Officer Brad Kallio with the group. *(Photo Credit: NHPD)*



Cazin Graduation Dec 6.



Sergeant **Chris Cazin** graduated from Northwestern University's School of Police Staff and Command on Dec. 6. This intensive leadership and management education program prepares experienced law enforcement professionals for success in senior command positions. **Chief Tim Hoyt** and **Captain Dave Johnson** attended the graduation ceremony in Eagan. Congratulations to Sgt. Cazin and everyone in Class #594! *(Photo Credit: NHPD)*



Happenings

Commissioner Bus Tour – Sept. 17



The annual commissioner bus tour was a success with 39 people in attendance, including several new City staff. The tour featured 14 projects from the last year, a tour of the public works expansion project and dinner at Civic Center Park. Special thanks to **Jeff Alger**, community development specialist, for coordinating the tour and staff that contributed and helped narrate. *(photo credit: Beth Kramer)*

Employee Golf - Oct. 2



Parks and recreation staff members **Jill Smisek**, **Penny Spitzer**, **Aaron Thelen**, recreation supervisor; **Mark Severson**, recreation facilities manager; and **Ricky Plemel**, golf course superintendent, organized a fantastic evening for the employee golf tournament. There were 26 participants, including 21 golfers. Attendees enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Jill and Penny, followed by the awarding of prizes: Closest to Pin #1 – Ben Skubie; Closest to Pin #3 – Nick Macklem; Closest to Pin #5 – None; Closest to Pin #8 – Kay Myers; Longest Putt #2 – Dave Lemke; Longest Putt #4 – Jason Ryan; Longest Putt #6 – Steve Swenson; Longest Putt #7 – Kevin Roddy; Longest Putt #9 – Jason Cunningham. The Low Gross Team consisted of the golf course team: Kay Myers, Kevin Roddy, Ben Skubie and Marty Medly, who tied with the parks and recreation Team: Aaron Thelen, Ricky Plemel, Tony

Portesan and Mark Severson, both with a score of 26; tie breaker was based on Hole #5 handicap). Additionally, everyone took home a fabulous door prize! In recognition of Kathi's retirement, she was driving in style in a decorated golf cart and cake was served. *(photo credits: Beth Kramer)*



Tom Mahan - October



Congratulations to **Tom Mahan**, animal control officer, for competing in Grandma's Marathon in Duluth and then the Twin Cities Marathon in October 2024 with his wife, Phyllis. Tom, who has completed several other marathons and triathlons, said that for both races this year he continued to surpass his personal records.



Jeff Alger receives Chief's Commendation - Oct. 14



Chief Sarah Larson awarded community development specialist, **Jeff Alger**, the Chief's Commendation Award at the Oct. 14 New Hope City Council meeting. Captain Jake Wheeler nominated Alger for the award, emphasizing his invaluable partnership and contributions to the West Metro Fire-Rescue District over the past few years. The nomination described how Alger has worked with the department to notify them of training opportunities at properties acquired by the City of New Hope as part of the City's Scattered Site Housing Program. Chief Larson stated, "These structures and houses are of indispensable value to public safety. Nothing else simulates the structures we respond to quite like the structures we respond to. His contributions to the community extend beyond his position title and contribute to the safety and health of the citizens and employees of the City of New Hope." (Photo Credit: Beth Kramer)

City Day and Trick or Trunk – Oct. 24



Thank you to Beth Kramer, communications coordinator, and Brad Kallio for organizing this joint event again this year. Additionally, thank you staff members who hosted booths, the commission volunteers, and the public works staff who provided vehicles despite the inclement weather. Staff welcomed residents of all ages to learn more about the City, partake in fun activities and take home Halloween treats! (Photo Credits: Beth Kramer)



Happenings—continued on next page

Public Works Open House—Oct 30



Mayor Hemken, along with members of the City Council, public works director **Bernie Weber**, and the New Hope Public Works staff, celebrated the official completion of our expanded public works facility with a ribbon-cutting ceremony!



Originally constructed in 1979, the facility now houses 22 employees and nearly 200 pieces of equipment. The expansion project was carried out in two phases over several years without the use of bonding. During its meeting on Oct. 28, the New Hope City Council proclaimed Oct. 30, 2024, as Public Works Day in the City of New Hope. This proclamation commemorates the opening of the Public Works facility and acknowledges the vital services provided by the dedicated employees who work there. *(Photo Credits: Beth Kramer)*



Kudos

On October 21, **Matt Rowedder**, utilities maintenance supervisor, had a chance encounter with a resident that told him how **Bill Broman**, maintenance worker, had worked with the resident several years prior on finding a leak and saving them thousands of dollars. The resident was still very grateful!



Employee Of the Quarter

Congratulations to **Vicki Thompson**, Administrative Specialist, for being named Employee of the Quarter for July-September 2024. Vicki was nominated for her consistent delivery of outstanding customer service and her positive attitude while working on early voting. One nominator shared that Vicki went above and beyond to assist elderly voters and explain the ballots. Her patience with each resident reflects her commendable positive demeanor. Another nominator expressed appreciation not only for Vicki's knowledge in guiding individuals but also for her friendliness, helpfulness, and professionalism. Vicki began her career with the city in 2021 as an Administrative Specialist.

Congratulations, and thank you to the additional nominee!

Connor Mueller, CSO, for asking to take on the responsibility of conducting fire extinguisher checks, as well as inspections of eye wash stations and garage doors, to ensure the City remains in compliance with OSHA regulations. (Photo Credit: Beth Kramer)



Employee Of Quarter



Congratulations to **Krissy Barthel** from the utility billing department for being selected as the Employee of the Quarter for October to December 2024. Krissy received multiple nominations for her extensive efforts during the transition to ACH payments. She played a crucial role in the transition from ACH change over to the Invoice Cloud, the software conversion to BS&A, and collaborated with BS&A to resolve account issues that occurred during the conversion. Throughout this process, she maintained a high level of customer service. Krissy consistently goes the extra mile to assist residents, guiding them through their bill payment options and helping them set up their accounts online, etc. all while treating them with courtesy and respect, even when it is not reciprocated. Not only is Krissy a great problem solver who is hardworking and dedicated, but she also brings positive energy and a cheerful demeanor to City Hall. Thank you, Krissy, for all that you do!

Congratulations, and thank you to the additional nominees!

Gina Karstens, administrative specialist for public works, is recognized for her exceptional dedication to ensuring that the residents of New Hope are well cared for. She diligently responded to numerous emails and voicemails during the BS&A transition. Despite her already packed schedule, Gina also volunteered her time to coordinate the employee recognition event.

Linda Bergemann, administrative specialist for community development, is recognized for her initiative in learning multiple modules in BS&A and for training others in the program. Linda is always willing to help in any way, including taking on the front counter coverage.

Shari Rains, accountant, has played a crucial role in helping City employees feel comfortable using the new BS&A and UKG timekeeping systems. She has dedicated significant time and effort to facilitate a smooth transition in these systems in a friendly and supportive manner.

Lorilee Stafford, administrative specialist for police, and **Riley McIlrath**, police office supervisor, are recognized for their dedication in working extra hours to wrap hundreds of gifts and deliver donations to NEAR. They have represented the police department in the best possible manner while still fulfilling their regular duties.

(Photo Credits: Beth Kramer)



Holiday Happenings



Blue Santa 2024

Blue Santa - Dec. 20

The police department hosted 10 families for the annual Blue Santa event, wrapping 501 presents! (Photo Credit: NHPD)



Blue Santa 2024



Coat Drive - Dec. 20

Officer **Brad Kallio** and Sergeant **Mike TenEyck** delivered approximately 125 coats for this year's Justin Morneau Winter Coat Drive. (Photo Credit: NHPD)



Food Drop off at NEAR from New Hope Dance



During the week of the December holiday parties at New Hope Dance, the classes collected canned food and non-perishable items for the food shelf. Over that week, New Hope Dance collected 219 pounds of food that **Aaron Thelen** brought to NEAR.

Food and Money Donations to NEAR for 2024

In December of 2024, organizer **Susan Rader**, made a final delivery to the NEAR food shelf. The total donations for 2024 amounted to 1,031 pounds of food and \$32 from public contributions, as well as \$865 collected from Wacky Wednesday employee participants.



Cookies Dec. 17

Thank you to former mayor, **Kathi Hemken** and her baking assistant and former city admin. specialist, **Lorraine Kloss**, for one final gifting of homemade cookies delivered to City staff over the holidays. The thousands of cookies over the years have brought many smiles to and much appreciation from staff during Kathi's time as mayor. *(photo credit: CCX Media)*



Service Recognition Event

More than 50 staff, council members and their guests enjoyed a fantastical magician, hearty meal and recognition program at Frankie's on Dec. 5. Thank you to **Gina Karstens**, admin. specialist for public works and other members of the public works team for a great event! Here are the individuals recognized for reaching 5-year milestones.

35 years

Susan Rader, Parks & Recreation Director
Steve Ellingson, Athletic Supervisor

30 years

Scott Slawson, Police Captain
Penny Spitzer, Admin. Specialist

25 years

Terry Meillier, Maintenance Worker
Pete Stanley, Police Sergeant
Tony Loser, Police Officer
Dave Johnson, Police Captain

20 years

Jill Smisek, Office Specialist
Art Sorenson, Maintenance Worker
Bernie Weber, Director of Public Works
James Bardon, Investigator
Chris Swaja, Police Sergeant

10 years

Josh Eernisse, Police Sergeant
Jeff Alger, Community Development Specialist
Mike Keithahn, Police Officer
Dave Lemke, Operations Manager
Aundrey Wallace, Maintenance Worker
Tony Gust, Investigator

5 years

Matt Rowedder, Utilities Maintenance Supervisor
Rhonda Peske, Police Clerk
Gina Karstens, Admin. Specialist



Departures

Several employees have departed the City since the last issue of News & Views was published. We wish them all them success in their future endeavors: Chris Audet, housing/code enforcement inspector (Sept. 26), Ben Rouse, police officer (Oct. 18), Mark Ales, maintenance worker (Oct. 22), Rob Dyson, maintenance worker (Nov. 25) and Vicki Thompson, admin. specialist for the city manager department (Dec. 3).

Recruitment

In addition to the employees featured in this issue, the City has completed two recruitments recently. **Anthony Larson** will be returning to the City as a police officer on Feb. 24. He started with the City as a CSO, was later promoted to police officer and then departed when he and his family relocated for a time to the Moorhead, Minnesota area. **James Flowers**, a New Hope resident, will also join the City on Feb. 24. His position will be the administrative specialist for the city manager department.

New Employee Spotlights

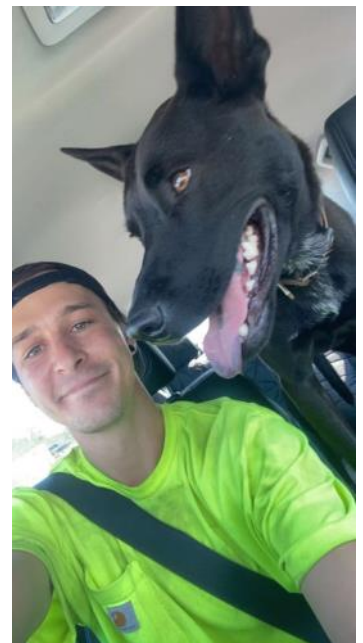
Jon Yankovec, Maintenance Worker - Jan. 13



Jon lives in Coon Rapids with his wife, Linda, and their miniature schnauzer, Cooper. They have two daughters: Alicia, 34, who leads a chaotic lifestyle in Dover, Delaware, with her husband and three children, and Tayler, 25, who enjoys an organized lifestyle in Brainerd with her husband. Jon grew up in the Cold Spring area in a family of eight children—seven boys and one girl. Before graduating from Rocori High School, one of his favorite childhood memories is playing ball in the neighborhood. Jon enjoys hunting, fishing, and biking on trails, as well as family vacations. A perfect day for him would be a family getaway to a beach in Mexico, specifically an all-inclusive resort in Puerto Vallarta, where his family often vacations. Although Jon feels that his skills are not as sharp as they once were, he won the snowplow “road”eo in St. Cloud in 2017, competing against over 100 contestants! Since childhood, Monday night has always been spaghetti night for his family. While some family members may not share the same enthusiasm, spaghetti remains one of Jon’s favorite foods. Other favorites of Jon include: Sports Team: Minnesota Vikings; Favorite Band: Pink Floyd; and Favorite Movie: Batman - The Dark Knight. *(Submitted Photo)*

Fuad Chehouri, Maintenance Worker - Jan. 13

Fuad is single living in Roseville. He has a brother who resides in Memphis, Tennessee, but his closest family member and friend is his cousin, Razan. Fuad grew up in Lino Lakes, where he graduated from Centennial High School in 2011. One of his favorite childhood pastimes was building bike jumps and riding in cornfields on their four-wheeler and bikes. This fun came to an end when someone brought a noisy two-stroke dirt bike, which attracted the attention of the police. Now, Fuad enjoys taking road trips, whether alone or with a friend, to explore new areas, as well as hiking and fishing. His favorite road trip was to Mount Rainier, where he hiked to the summit above the clouds, enjoying the breathtaking view before settling at the base of the mountain to camp for a few days. He liked it so much that he has done this twice! A perfect day for him would start with morning coffee followed by hiking in the mountains. Other memorable trips include flying to Boston and Mexico. Fuad also enjoys disc golf. So much that he plays at a competitive level. Although he has placed second many times, he finally won first place during a competition in Hastings in 2024. Here are some fun facts about Fuad: his favorite music genre is hip-hop, his favorite food is Middle Eastern cuisine (particularly falafel) and seafood, his favorite sports team is the Minnesota Vikings, his favorite book is Alchemist by Paulo Coelho, and his favorite movie is Dark Knight. That is not a typo! *(Submitted Photo)*



Katherine Jaeger, Farmer's Market Coordinator - Jan. 2



Katherine has been living in Plymouth for the past 25 years with her husband Jon of 26 years. They have three boys. Sam lives in St. Louis Park, Alex lives in the state of Oregon with his three and a half year old daughter, Adela and AJ lives in St. Paul. Sadly, they lost two dogs this year. Corey, a seven year-old mixed breed in April and Cya (See-a), 16 ½ year old wirehaired pointing griffon in October. Her mother lives on Leech Lake and her dad lives in New Ulm. She has three sisters and one brother. Katherine grew up in New Ulm. She hesitantly told me that in high school she was first runner up to Miss New Ulm. She has fond memories of living with her grandparents in Nebraska for the summers during many years as a child. When the heat got to be too much, she enjoyed sitting in the rocking chair reading books in the cool basement. Katherine's perfect day

would start out by working on The New York Times Games: Wordle, Quordle, Connections and Tightrope followed by a long walk. She would then enjoy time reading as well as spending time in the kitchen baking. Katherine volunteers for Friends of Plymouth Library where she is the chair for their book sales. She also volunteers for Loaves and Fishes at her church. When she isn't busy volunteering, she visits her granddaughter in Oregon as much as possible. Her favorite book to recommend to people is The Story of Edgar Sawtelle by David Wroblewski. Her favorite movie is Young Frankenstein and her favorite food is chocolate. She is happy to be working for the City and excited to be involved in the new farmer's market position. Everyone has made her feel welcome. *(Submitted Photo)*

Wellness

Harvesting and Preserving – Sept. 19

Seven colleagues shared best practices they have acquired over the years for harvesting, canning and other methods of preserving their gardens as they enjoyed lunch from Café Zupas.

Outdoor Activity Passes – October

Twenty-one employees took advantage of roughly half price rounds at New Hope Golf, a Minnesota State Parks permit or tickets to the zoo or arboretum. What a great excuse to get outside!

Trash It or Bin It – Nov. 14

Tim Pratt, recycling coordinator for the Hennepin Recycling Group, spoke to a group of seven as they dined on Qdoba. He answered many questions and provided updates since he last presented for a wellness program several years ago. Tim is passionate about his work and always happy to make himself available for City programs.

Broomball – Jan. 29

Scott Stephan, ice arena maintenance operator and broomball international champion, along with **Aaron Thelen**, gave a fantastic introduction (or refresher for some) to the game of broomball on the south rink. It was a great workout for five additional employees including The Jolly Journalist.

Biometric Screening – Feb. 11-13

The City will again be using the services of New Hope Hy-Vee to provide biometric screening for New Hope benefit-eligible staff. It only takes about 15 minutes and you receive great health information and \$60 in gift certificates. Look for sign-up information on employee bulletin boards and the emailed employee updates.



Weddings

Congratulations to our newlywed employees and their spouses!

Tom Lesnikowski, police officer, and his bride, Taylor. They were married on Sept. 14 in the chapel at the University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul. The university is also where they met. (Submitted Photo)



Ricky Plemel, golf superintendent, and his bride, Sarah. They were married on Nov. 15 in Hanalei Bay, Kauai, Hawaii. (Submitted Photo)



Alaina Steelman, police clerk, and her husband, Josh. They were married on Sept. 21 at their new home in Dayton. (Submitted Photo)



In Memoriam

Our sympathies to the family of **Bob Cronberg**, retired police officer, for his passing on Sept. 18. Bob worked with the City from 1969 until his retirement in 1993.



Thank you!

To Jill Smisek, without whom this issue would never have made it out the door. Jill compiled my mess, conducted interviews, wrote articles and designed it all. I am in your debt!
—The Jolly Journalist

To each and every benefited employee for completing your open enrollment this year. We know that this year has been a challenge with the many new systems we are all learning and this process was no different with a completely new system.