



# ANOKA COUNTY NEWS

Volume 3-2015

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**Anoka County**  
MINNESOTA

Respectful. Innovative. Fiscally Responsible

## COST SHIFTS IMPACT PROPERTY TAXES

After four consecutive years with minimal or no increase, Anoka County is proposing to raise its property tax levy by 2.49 percent for 2016. Much of the increase is due to the transfer of costs from the state to the county for mandated services to children, vulnerable adults, and people with mental illness.

The growing cost to counties is especially significant for individuals housed at the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center (AMRTC). Patients here often have complex case histories and multiple needs.

The county's share of the cost of a patient's stay at the AMRTC was 10 percent in 2008. Today, Anoka County can bear the entire \$1,309 per day cost immediately after admission. "Compounding the problem, when clients no longer require the intensive level of care at the AMRTC, there is often nowhere else for them to go," said Anoka County Board Chair Rhonda Sivarajah. "They remain at the AMRTC until there is an opening at another less restrictive facility, but until then, Anoka County pays the \$1,309 daily rate."

Recent changes recommended by the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children will result

in much higher costs to screen, investigate, and manage alleged child abuse cases. New guidelines will likely see more children moved to foster homes and other out-of-home living situations, increasing county costs.

The current push by state officials to release sex offenders from treatment programs will also financially impact counties. Ongoing technical issues with MNsure, the state's health care exchange, has required adding additional staff to handle the backlog of people wanting to renew or sign up. A promised automated registration process is not yet functional, meaning much information must be entered manually. A simple task, such as adding a "life event," can take 45 minutes or more.

"Life is precious," Sivarajah said. "Caring for our citizens, especially our most vulnerable, is our top priority. However, making changes at the state level while asking counties to pay for it puts us in a difficult position."

"The county board has worked diligently to keep property taxes low, even while absorbing more than \$6 million in cost shifts from the state and federal government in the past five years," Sivarajah said. "The small levy increase will help us begin to cover the expense of the transfer of costs from the state to counties."

Go to [anokacounty.us](http://anokacounty.us) to find more information about Anoka County's budget. Learn more about how the tax levy affects your property tax bill by watching the "Property Tax 101" video at <http://tinyurl.com/q77aoo7>.



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**CARING FOR OUR CITIZENS, ESPECIALLY OUR MOST VULNERABLE, IS OUR TOP PRIORITY. HOWEVER, MAKING CHANGES AT THE STATE LEVEL WHILE ASKING COUNTIES TO PAY FOR IT PUTS US IN A DIFFICULT POSITION.**

Rhonda Sivarajah, Chair  
Anoka County Board



Volume 3-2015

# A NEW WAY FOR U.S. HWY. 10



Mid-October aerial looking east on U.S. Hwy. 10 at Armstrong Blvd.

The new interchange at U.S. Hwy. 10 and Armstrong Blvd. in Ramsey will open in phases, beginning with the eastbound exit/entrance ramps/loop and Armstrong Blvd. south of Hwy. 10 in November 2015; the westbound exit/entrance ramps, bridge over the railroad tracks, and Armstrong Blvd. north of Hwy. 10 in early December 2015; and the full interchange, including the bridge over Hwy. 10, open to all traffic by the end of December 2015. That's welcome news for area residents and businesses who've had to contend with the closure of Armstrong Blvd. and the attending detours and roadway reroutes. But the safety and efficiency enhancements the new interchange brings will be well worth the construction inconvenience, according to Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look, who represents District 1, which includes the city of Ramsey. "This project addresses a significant safety concern, with the railroad crossing being so close to the intersection," he said. "With the signal light removed, the 33,500 to 61,000 motorists who travel this roadway each day will also see better traffic flow and reduced congestion."

Completion of the U.S. Hwy. 10/Armstrong Blvd. project is just the first step in plans to further improve the entire U.S. Hwy. 10 corridor. Future enhancements include removing traffic signals on U.S. Hwy. 10 at Thurston/Fairoak Aves. in Anoka; and Ramsey Blvd. and Sunfish Lake Blvd. in Ramsey; and extending the third traffic lane in Coon Rapids.

## ANOKA COUNTY COMPOST SITES

Anoka County's two compost sites will remain open until November 30, weather permitting.

**BUNKER HILLS**  
13285 Hanson Blvd.  
Coon Rapids  
Open April-November  
Mon-Fri 10 AM-sunset  
Sat 9 AM-sunset  
Sun 12 PM-sunset  
763-767-7964

**RICE CREEK**  
7701 Main St.  
Lino Lakes  
Open April-November  
Tues & Thur 10 AM-sunset  
Sat 9 AM-sunset  
Sun 12 PM-sunset  
Closed Mon, Wed, & Fri  
763-767-7964

The Bunker Hills site will reopen for two weekends in January to accept Christmas trees and evergreen garland, plus yard and tree waste (leaves, grass clippings, garden waste, brush, logs, and stumps).

Bunker Hills compost site January 2016 hours  
Saturday, January 2 & 9: 9 AM-4:30 PM  
Sunday, January 3 & 10: 12-4:30 PM

Go to [anokacounty.us/yardwaste](http://anokacounty.us/yardwaste) or call 763-323-5730 to learn more. Note: Fees are charged for yard and tree waste.

## ANOKA COUNTY HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE FACILITY

3230 101st Ave. N.E., Blaine

Accepting unneeded household products that are corrosive, flammable, combustible, or poisonous.

November-March hours  
Wed. 2-8 PM & Sat. 9 AM-3 PM

Questions?  
Call 763-323-5730 or  
go to [anokacounty.us/hhw](http://anokacounty.us/hhw)



## Organics recycling

Organics are the biodegradable portion of trash that can be composted including:

- all food scraps such as leftovers, peelings, and spoiled food;
- soiled, non-recyclable papers such as paper towels, napkins, delivery pizza boxes;
- certified compostable products such as plastic food ware and bags labeled with a Cedar Grove Composting or Biodegradable Products Institute logo.

**Why recycle organics?**  
Organics make up 25-35 percent of what we throw away. Organics can be recycled into valuable compost instead of being thrown away. Compost benefits all soil types and greatly improves moisture retention in sandy soil.

**Who is collecting organics for composting?**

Several schools and restaurants in Anoka County have started organics collection programs. Organics collection is also happening at community events and high traffic destinations such as the 3M Championship Golf

Tournament and Bunker Beach Water Park. Anoka County is working with public and private partners to offer more organics recycling opportunities for residents. Stay tuned for more information on local collection opportunities.

**What else can I do?**

Always look for ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Reduce your food waste by purchasing only what you need or by freezing items to use later. Use plates, cups, silverware and cloth napkins rather than disposable items. Donate canned and dry goods that you can't use by the expiration date. Use backyard composting for food scraps.

Watch for organics collection containers at events; most containers have signs to identify types of items accepted. Large venues like the Minnesota Twins and St. Paul Saints ballparks also offer organics collection. Go to [anokacounty.us/recycle](http://anokacounty.us/recycle) to learn more about organics or call Recycling & Resource Solutions at 763-323-5730.

# New airport security standards ahead

Travelers, take note: beginning in 2016, you may not be able to use your Minnesota driver's license or state-issued ID to board a commercial airplane.

The 2005 Federal Real ID Act, passed in the wake of 9/11, mandates more stringent security standards for state-issued driver's licenses. It also prohibits federal agencies, including federally regulated commercial airlines, from accepting IDs that do not meet the new minimum standards.

U.S. passport books and passport cards do meet the new security standards. Anoka County accepts

applications for both passport books and cards at its two passport centers:



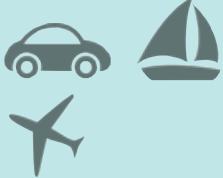


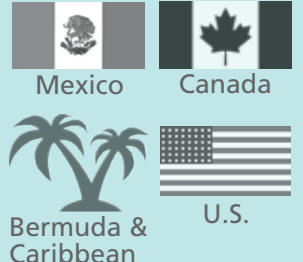



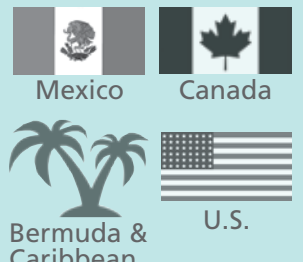


- Blaine Passport Center, 10995 Club West Pkwy., Suite 700b
- Coon Rapids Passport Center, 455 99th Ave., Suite 100b

You may apply for a passport card even if you already have a passport book. Customers are strongly encouraged to use the online scheduler to make an appointment for a passport application. Find it at [anokacounty.us/passport](http://anokacounty.us/passport).

Real ID compliant identification is already required to pass security checkpoints at most federal facilities

and all nuclear power plants. Though a firm date has not been announced, it is expected the Department of Homeland Security will begin enforcement at airports in early 2016.

Minnesota offers an enhanced driver's license (EDL) that is federally approved. The EDL can be used for land and sea travel to Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, or the Caribbean and for domestic air travel in the U.S. The EDL is currently only available at select State Driver's License Exam Stations. Go to [dps.mn.gov](http://dps.mn.gov) for more information.

ID TYPE	COST	FOR TRAVEL WHERE?	MODE OF TRANSPORT	GET IT HERE
 <b>PASSPORT</b>	\$110 payable to U.S. Dept. of State + \$25 payable to Anoka County + fee for photos. <i>Valid 10 years</i>	 Foreign & Domestic		 Blaine & Coon Rapids Passport Centers
 <b>PASSPORT CARD</b>	\$30 payable to U.S. Dept. of State + \$25 payable to Anoka County + fee for photos <i>Valid 10 years</i>	 Mexico Canada Bermuda & Caribbean U.S.	 Domestic U.S. air only	 Blaine & Coon Rapids Passport Centers
 <b>ENHANCED DRIVER'S LICENSE</b>	Driver's license renewal fee + \$15 <i>Valid 4 years</i>	 Mexico Canada Bermuda & Caribbean U.S.	 Domestic U.S. air only	 Select MN Driver's License Exam Stations

# ANOKA COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

## Justice for veterans in Anoka County

by Anoka County Attorney Tony Palumbo

Several years ago, *60 Minutes* ran a story about a special Veteran's Court in Harris County, Texas, that described how the criminal justice system there deals with veterans who get in trouble with the law after ending their military service. The Harris County Veteran's Court uses a drug court model to serve veterans who are struggling with substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental illness, and other issues. It works to address underlying conditions related to military service that veterans may have. The goal is to assist veterans in getting the help they need and avoid a criminal record and lengthy jail time.

### Anoka County Veteran's Court

Thanks to efforts by the Anoka County Attorney's Office and two Anoka County judges, a similar model is working here in Anoka County. Since the Anoka County Veteran's Court launched in November 2013, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, corrections agents, county Veteran Services officers, representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other professionals meet regularly to address issues facing veterans who have felony or certain misde-

meanor criminal charges. To date, 64 veterans have been involved in the Veteran's Court program; six have already graduated. Most veterans in the program have not committed another crime.

### How does it work?

Participation is entirely voluntary and veterans must be eligible for VA benefits to qualify. Anoka County's Veteran's Court tailors criminal justice consequences to a defendant's unique situation. At the same time, the veteran gets help obtaining the VA benefits to which they are already entitled.

If a veteran agrees to participate and meets the qualifications, his or her case will be analyzed by the prosecution, a probation officer, a VA representative, the defense attorney, and the Veteran's Court judge. The veteran must plead guilty and then cooperate with the VA in obtaining appropriate help, which may include substance abuse treatment, physical and/or mental health care, peer mentorship, employment services, disability claim assistance, housing assistance, financial counseling and more. (Serious crimes where prison is the recommended sentence will not be considered unless there are extraordinary circumstances.) Veterans who complete the recommended

program will be given due consideration at sentencing for their crime.

### A second chance

The success of the Veteran's Court model is spreading. There are now more than 100 Veteran's Courts in 27 states offering a variety of approaches to addressing veterans' issues.

Anoka County Veteran's Court is an innovative way to respond to those men and women who have given service to our country but who have made mistakes which, if left unaddressed, may lead to repeat crimes and long-term incarceration. We all benefit from giving a second chance to a veteran who has strayed: the public by reducing recidivism and individual veterans by providing another opportunity for them to be a productive member of society.



# EXPLORE OUTDOORS!



## Your Ticket to 11,500 Acres!

An Anoka County Parks gift card makes an excellent gift for the holidays or any occasion. Gift cards can be used throughout the Anoka County Park system including Chomonix Golf Course, Bunker Beach Water Park, and Wargo Nature Center. Gift cards can be purchased in any amount over \$10 and can have value added as needed. Call the Parks & Recreation office at 763-757-3920 to order today.

### Anoka County Parks offer opportunities to enjoy nature close to home

Bunker Beach Water Park  
763-767-2895

Camping & Pavilion  
Reservations  
763-757-3920

Chomonix Golf Course  
651-482-8484

Coon Rapids Dam  
Visitor Center  
763-757-4700

Park Rangers  
612-719-4875

Wargo Nature Center  
651-429-8007

Anoka County residents are lucky to have a premier county and regional park system right in their own neighborhood. The county park system features more than 11,500 acres of parkland and 120+ miles of trails.

The Anoka County park system was established more than 50 years ago and continues to grow and evolve to accommodate changes in the county's population. More than 3.6 million people visited Anoka County parks in 2014. This includes not only county residents but also visitors from all over the state who enjoy our parks and also support local businesses. Our parks have something for everyone,

whether camping, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, hiking, archery, and more.

As the weather turns colder, we look forward to snow-related activities: cross-country skiing, kicksledding, snowshoeing, and more. Many of the walking trails are cleared during the winter months for easy access and in addition, close to 50 kilometers of groomed cross-country ski trails will be ready and waiting once Mother Nature provides enough snow. Wargo Nature Center also offers plenty of enrichment programs to help you learn about nature and offer much-needed relief from cabin fever.

See you in the parks!



#### WINTER RECREATION CAMP

Wargo Nature Center  
December 28; 9 AM–3 PM  
East Coon Rapids Dam  
Regional Park

December 29; 9 AM–3 PM

This one-day camp is a great way for kids in 3rd–6th grade to get outdoors in the winter. The day will be packed full of winter activities including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, kicksledding, winter games, and more. Come join in on the winter fun!

**\$25/person (+tax)**



#### EXPERIENCE WINTER RECREATION

Wargo Nature Center  
December 20; 1–3 PM

Looking for some outdoor family fun? Get a taste of some of the many things to do outside in Minnesota during our colder months. You will sample a variety of recreational activities including kicksledding, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. This event is open to families and individuals of all ages. Pre-registration is required.

**\$7/adult  
\$5/child (+ tax)**



#### SNOWSHOEING

East Coon Rapids Dam  
Regional Park  
December 19; 12–2 p.m.

Winter is a great time to get out and enjoy nature's wonders. Coon Rapids Dam is a wonderful setting for exploring on snowshoes. If there is enough snow, we will break out the snowshoes and get into some of the less traveled areas of the park. This program is well-suited for families and groups of all ages.

**\$7/adult, \$5/child  
(15 and under) + tax**

2016 camping reservations open January 4 at 8 AM  
Make your reservation online at [anokacountyparks.com](http://anokacountyparks.com)

Register for classes with Wargo Nature Center TODAY!  
Call 651-429-8007 or go to [anokacountyparks.com](http://anokacountyparks.com)

## IT'S TIME TO "MAN UP"

by Anoka County Sheriff James Stuart

Each year, I have the privilege of attending a variety of programs and events that work to combat domestic and sexual violence. While it is obvious to most of society why domestic and sexual violence is unacceptable behavior, it continues to be a taboo topic to discuss or take a vocal stance against. This is especially true among males. For example, most of the aforementioned anti-violence events and programs are well-attended. But the majority of attendees are female, and that concerns me. Men need to become more engaged in the fight against sexual and domestic violence, especially since 98 percent of perpetrators are males. The reality is we all need to stand united in our community to say, "This is NOT acceptable behavior and it will not be tolerated!"

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:

- 76 percent of intimate partner physical violence victims are female;
- Every nine seconds, a woman is assaulted or beaten in the U.S.;
- Domestic violence accounts for 15 percent of all violent crimes;
- Nearly one in five females will experience

- rape in their lifetime, with more than 50 percent occurring before age 18 and 25 percent occurring before age 10;
- One in three females will experience physical violence by an intimate partner;
- 19.3 million women have been stalked by a current or former intimate partner;
- In 2012, 924 women were killed by intimate partners in the U.S.;
- One in three female murder victims are killed by intimate partners;
- 26 percent of teens in relationships become victims of cyber abuse;
- 50 percent of teen victims also report having at-

**MEN NEED TO BECOME MORE ENGAGED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, ESPECIALLY SINCE 98 PERCENT OF PERPETRATORS ARE MALES.**

- tempted suicide;
- The economic impact of domestic violence exceeds \$8.3 billion annually in the U.S.

Domestic and sexual violence occurs in every culture, neighborhood, and community. This needs to change.

Men, I'm calling you out. Have you made it clear to your daughters how important they are and how they should demand to be treated? Have you made it clear to your sons how a real man treats a woman? Have your actions affirmed your words? Do you speak up when inappropriate comments are made by other men? Do you initiate discussion about inappropriate things that are seen on TV or in a movie? Do you support local events and organizations that work to combat domestic and sexual violence?

We are one community. Our involvement, or lack of, will have an impact on the future of our society. Men, it's time to ask yourself, "Have I stepped up to make a positive difference in my community?" If the answer is no, the time has come to get off the couch and get in the game. The women in our lives and communities deserve better.



## IT'S TIME TO GET YOUR FLU SHOT

Getting vaccinated for influenza, more commonly known as "the flu," should be on everyone's to-do list at this time of year. Flu viruses are constantly changing and the flu vaccine is often updated from one season to the next to protect against new strains. Getting a flu shot each year is the first and most important step to protect yourself.

### What is influenza?

Influenza is a contagious disease that can be prevented by immunization. It is not the same as the "stomach flu" or the common cold. Influenza

is caused by a virus that attacks the nose, throat, and lungs. A cold generally stays up in the head while the flu brings body aches, fever, and extreme fatigue. It can cause mild to severe illness and at times, even death.

### When should I get my shot?

You can get your flu shot anytime during flu season but for best protection, get vaccinated in the fall before flu season starts. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for your body to develop an immune response.

### Why get a flu shot?

Getting a flu shot (or the nasal spray) not only protects you, but also the people around you who are at greater risk of getting very sick, such as babies, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with chronic diseases.

### What else can I do to protect against the flu?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Stay at home if you are sick.

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizer.
- Take special care to protect infants. Avoid close contact with sick family members.

To find out where you can get a flu shot, call Anoka County Disease Prevention and Control at 763-422-6970 or call the Anoka County Immunization Information number at 763-323-6100.

## SAFE EXCHANGE ZONE

The Anoka County Sheriff's Office new "Exchange Zone" is making it safer to use Craigslist and other online marketplaces. The Exchange Zone, a safe place for buyers and sellers to meet, is located in the parking lot of the Sheriff's Office headquarters on Hanson Blvd. in Andover. The area is well lit and has

an emergency call box and security cameras that run 24 hours a day. The public is also welcome to use the Sheriff's Office lobby from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. to



conduct their transactions, according to Sheriff James Stuart. "Having the Exchange Zone lets people feel a bit more secure about meeting a stranger to buy and sell items," he said. "It's an added measure of safety."

## LIBRARIES: A PLACE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Anoka County Library supports lifelong learning by offering educational programs, online learning resources, one-on-one technology instruction, research assistance, a diverse collection, and simply by providing a quiet place to think. Following are some of the ways the Library fosters lifelong learning in our community.

### Early Literacy Storytimes

You are your child's first and best teacher. Anoka County Library early literacy storytimes support parents and caregivers as we talk, read, write, sing, and play. Librarians who are trained in early literacy research and skill-building design storytimes to meet the developmental needs of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Early literacy storytimes at your Anoka County Library incorporate the pre-reading skills children need to become successful readers. Holding a ball today leads to identifying and eventually writing the letter O. Touching a board book and turning the pages creates excitement for babies around books. Singing a song raises awareness of the syllables that make up each word and eventually helps young readers sound out words when learning to read. Parents and caregivers will take away new ideas for developing their children's early literacy skills while connecting with other parents in their community.

Learn more about building early literacy skills by watching the video *Together We Can Be Ready to Read* at <http://tinyurl.com/qj5esyc>.

For storytime information or to register for the winter storytime session, go to [anokacountylibrary.org](http://anokacountylibrary.org).



*Jeni Ohr and her son, Daniel, enjoy early literacy storytime at Crooked Lake Library*

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
**LAST YEAR, 17,332 CHILDREN AND THEIR CAREGIVERS**  
**ATTENDED 1,055 STORYTIMES AT ANOKA COUNTY LIBRARY!**

## lynda.com free at the Library

**lynda.com** is a popular online education service that offers more than 3,600 video tutorials in software, creative, and business skills. Anoka County Library is thrilled to announce that access to **lynda.com** is now free with your library card, thanks to funding from the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA). Users can learn at their own pace with **lynda.com**. Course offerings include CAD, IT, marketing, photography, video, web, 3D and animation, design, business, education, and more. With so many course offerings – and new ones added every week – you could learn something new every day for the next several years, all from the comfort of your living room! Explore the complete **lynda.com** catalog at [anokacountylibrary.org](http://anokacountylibrary.org).



## DIGITAL LITERACY

Whether it's downloading a free eBook from the library, finding photos of the grandkids on Facebook, or filling out online forms, there is never a shortage of new things to learn

when it comes to computers and technology. Anoka County Library supports people who are new to using a computer or the Internet in a variety of ways:

- Library staff at several locations offer one-on-one technology instruction.
- Northtown Library and Rum River Library offer *Senior Surf* classes presented by instructors from the Metro Area Agency on Aging.
- Library staff and volunteers are available to guide technology novices anytime on a drop-in basis. For more targeted instruction, attend *Tech Time* at the Rum River Library from 1-4 PM every Monday.
- Interested in downloading free eBooks from the comfort of your home? Staff at any Anoka County Library location can help anytime, or you can stop by during an eBook help session at the Northtown Library or Rum River Library.

For more information, go to [anokacountylibrary.org](http://anokacountylibrary.org) or speak with a librarian at any library location.



## Online help with homework

Are your kids sending out a homework SOS? Get one-on-one homework help from trained tutors online with *Homework Rescue*. It's free with your library card! Tutors help students master underlying academic concepts and are available from 1-11 PM seven days a week. All core subject areas are covered for grades 3-12: science (biology, chemistry, physics, and earth science); math (algebra I and II; geometry, trigonometry and calculus); social studies; English/language arts; writing assistance; and reading assistance. Go to [anokacountylibrary.org](http://anokacountylibrary.org) and find the Homework Rescue link on the Kids or Teens page or under the Research tab. Sponsored by the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA).



## HELPING YOU DO BUSINESS

Looking to start or expand a business but need help securing financing? Not sure how to market your product or service online? Wondering if the location you're considering is right for you?

The *Open to Business* program is here to help. Offered by Anoka County, in partnership with the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD), *Open to Business* offers entrepreneurs free, one-on-one business consulting and help making strategic decisions.

Business advisors provide assistance in the following areas:

- Accounting/record-keeping
- Business acquisition and startup
- Developing a business plan
- Cashflow
- Loan packaging
- Networking
- Operations
- Strategic planning
- Commercial real estate analysis
- Marketing, and more!

Learn how you can get help growing your business by contacting Business Advisor Kathleen DuChene at 763-438-7315 or [kduchene@mccdmn.org](mailto:kduchene@mccdmn.org) or by going to [opentobusinessmn.org](http://opentobusinessmn.org).



## THANK YOU MEDLINK VOLUNTEER DRIVERS!

The contribution of 54 volunteer drivers for Anoka County's MedLink Transportation Program was recognized recently at a luncheon held in their honor.

Volunteer drivers provide transportation for more than 1,500 passengers, most of whom are seniors and veterans. In the past year, volunteer drivers logged more than 122,454 miles on 5,902 trips. Most of the trips were to and from veterans' medical facilities in Minneapolis, St. Cloud, Ramsey, and Maplewood, as well as other clinics and medical facilities.

If you are in need of driving services or would like to be a volunteer driver, call 763-422-7087.

(At right) Three drivers were recognized for logging the most miles in the last year: From left: Anoka County Commissioners Mike Gamache and Scott Schulte; Driver David Adrian (11,517 miles); Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look; Driver Laura Louis (7,134 miles); Anoka County Commissioner Robyn West; Driver Herbert Wildung (11,359 miles); Anoka County Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah, Julie Braastad, and Jim Kordiak.



Several drivers were honored for their long years of service to MedLink. From left: Anoka County Commissioners Mike Gamache, Matt Look, Rhonda Sivarajah, and Julie Braastad; Volunteer Drivers Ronald Bernard (15 years) and Bruce Derscheid (10 years); Anoka County Commissioners Robyn West, Scott Schulte, and Jim Kordiak.



## RADON TEST KITS AVAILABLE

Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that seeps up from the earth. Long-term exposure to radon can lead to lung cancer. Radon is present everywhere, but the greatest risk of exposure is indoors, especially in your home. In Minnesota, two in five homes have radon levels that pose a significant health risk. Homes with radon can be old or new, well-sealed or drafty, with or without a basement.



Testing your home for radon is easy and inexpensive. Anoka County has residential radon test kits available for \$5. To get your kit, go to [anokacounty.us/radon](http://anokacounty.us/radon) or call 763-323-5722 to learn more.

## CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!

Join the Anoka County Retired, Senior, and Volunteer Program (RSVP) and use your talents to make a positive change in your community! If you are age 55 or better, you'll be paired with a county nonprofit or social services program that needs your help. Learn more! Call or email Tricia at 763-422-7090 or email [tricia.lehti@co.anoka.mn.us](mailto:tricia.lehti@co.anoka.mn.us).



### Be a Group Respite Volunteer

Anoka County's Family Caregiver Connection seeks caring, patient, and dependable volunteers who are interested in working with seniors. We are in special need of volunteers who are registered nurses. Provide fellowship, activities, and socialization for people who are experiencing a long-term illness and give their caregivers the opportunity to benefit from support groups, education, or simply several hours of respite. The time commitment is flexible but averages six to 12 hours a month.

## FIGHTING TEEN DRUG & ALCOHOL USE

A program designed to fight drug and alcohol use among teens is yielding positive results in the St. Francis and Centennial School Districts. The Chemical Health Initiative, funded by an Anoka County Children and Family Council School District Partnership Grant, focuses on preventing the use of gateway drugs, such as alcohol and marijuana, and urges parents to talk to their children early, and on a consistent basis, about the dangers of alcohol and drugs.

As part of the Initiative, students' perception of the extent of drug and alcohol use among their peers was measured by holding listening sessions and conducting student,

parent, and staff surveys. Among the key findings:

- Students overestimate the level of alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use by their peers;
- Alcohol and marijuana use substantially increases between 8th and 9th grade;
- The use of non-prescribed prescription drugs is an area of growing concern.

Students and school staff produced a series of videos in which district students shared their own experiences with alcohol and drug addiction. The videos will be used, along with other chemical awareness resources, throughout the school year in St. Francis and Centennial

schools, including the Pines School, located at the Anoka County Juvenile Center.

Following are links to the videos produced by the Chemical Health Initiative:

<https://vimeo.com/129056948>  
St. Francis Middle School Video

<https://vimeo.com/129213603>  
Centennial Middle School Video

<https://vimeo.com/127442425>  
Pines School Video

<https://vimeo.com/140231886>  
Parent Video

## OPEN YOUR HEART AND HOME



Anoka County urgently needs foster homes for children of all ages. Can you help?

Call 763-422-7144 or go to [anokacounty.us/childfostercare](http://anokacounty.us/childfostercare)

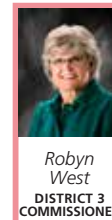
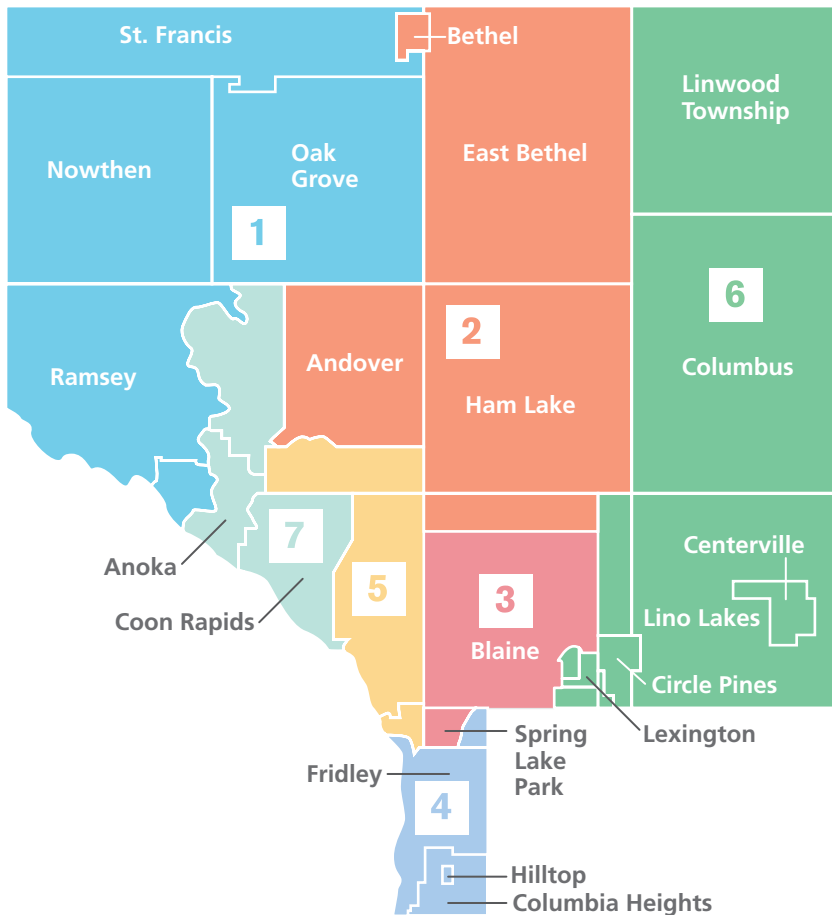
YOU CAN CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE.



*Visit our website!*

**ANOKA COUNTY LEADERSHIP**

**763-323-5700**



County board meetings are generally held the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at 9:30 a.m. in Room 705 of the Anoka County Government Center in Anoka. Watch board meetings live at [anokacounty.us](http://anokacounty.us).

Anoka County News is produced by Anoka County Public Information, Martha Weaver, Manager, 763-323-5744  
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