

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
March/April/May 2002

JANICE RETTMAN
County Commissioner
District 3

220 City Hall / Courthouse
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102
Fax 266-8370, Phone 266-8360

Dear District 3 Resident:

I hope this newsletter provides you with information on some of the issues being handled by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. The thoughts expressed in this newsletter are mine and/or my staff's. These thoughts are provided to citizens as part of my responsibility to keep you informed on what I am doing as your County Commissioner. Gene Haselmann is the editor and chief author of our newsletter. If I or my staff can be of assistance to you, please call us at **266-8360**.

Sincerely, **Janice**

In This Report	
1. <u>Remember Florida?</u>	2. <u>Tax Forfeit Property Nets Profit</u>
3. <u>Election 2002</u>	4. <u>Homeland Security</u>
5. <u>State Budget Impacts</u>	6. <u>A Solid Waste Primer</u>
7. <u>New Staff Arrivals</u>	8. <u>Rettman Receives Award</u>
9. <u>A Volunteer is Needed</u>	10. <u>Saving Good Bye ...</u>
11. <u>County Mandated Trash Collection</u>	
<u>Rettman's Home Page</u>	<u>Board of Commissioners</u>

REMEMBER FLORIDA?

Did you ever wonder who those dedicated people who register you at voting polls are? They are your friends, neighbors and maybe even relatives. Many are retired while others take time off from work, but all are dedicated "volunteers" who help make sure that our elections are fair and honest. You can be one of them too!

Ramsey County needs people to serve as election judges for the primary and general elections, September 10 and November 5th this year. You may work one or both days, ½

day or full day. The pay is minimal (\$7/hour) but you may be able to get time off work without losing wages, under some conditions.

Contact the County at 651-266-2171 or go to the County website (<http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us>) for information (look under **elections**) on getting your name on the list. Staff will follow-up with a training class and assign you to a precinct near your home. You must be an eligible voter – but then - you already vote, right?

[Return to the report menu](#)

TAX FORFEIT PROPERTY NETS PROFIT

The loss of tax dollars due to unpaid taxes can be a problem for county residents because each of us must help contribute toward making up the difference. But the time and effort necessary to maintain records on a large inventory of unbuildable space is also a problem. Under state law the county may sell tax-forfeited properties at auction to repay the debt. While we do not like to exercise this authority we also do not need to accumulate these parcels.

At our most recent auction we sold 38 parcels raising nearly \$450,000 for the general fund. Several parcels that are difficult to sell, such as those that are too small to build on, are still available and may be purchased directly. One of them may even be next to your house and could be added to your lot. You can contact the Department of Records and Revenue at 651-266-2081 for information on available parcels.

Are registered to vote? If not, contact Ramsey County at 651-266-2171 for an application.

[Return to the report menu](#)

ELECTION 2002

Besides the race for governor, this is a big year for the elective process. Following each census, legislative district boundaries are redrawn to reflect any changes in the make up of the community. These new boundaries are designed to assure that each person's vote is equal. Consideration is given not just to how many people live within each district but also what is their common thread, be it community issues, incomes or even natural boundaries such as major roads and rivers.

As a result of these new boundaries, each city must also draw new precinct boundaries that coincide with those districts so **where you vote may change**. In addition, city council districts may change in those communities that elect by ward, as could Ramsey County Board districts. Watch local newspapers for information or check the Ramsey County web page at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us>. The decision regarding Ramsey County Board boundaries must be made by May 28th of this year.

If you are interested in more information on new districts or the redistricting process, check with the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office in the State Office Building or under **Constitutional Offices** at <http://www.state.mn.us>

[Return to the report menu](#)

HOMELAND SECURITY

Much has been written recently about security at the City Hall/Court House in Saint Paul. Commissioner Rettman is as concerned about the safety of employees and visitors as anyone, however, the current plan is a major cost in a time of lost revenues, budget cutting and possibly a reduction in county jobs. Before a plan is implemented it deserves serious discussion.

First, we need to keep in mind that the Courthouse is one of the many public buildings that belong to all of the residents of Ramsey County and who, the Commissioner believes, should be able to access it freely to complete their business. It is also a historic building and one of our prized landmarks that deserves to be treated with respect. We have all seen a special building that was damaged or destroyed because of over reaction to a problem and solutions that were not well thought out. This is something that we want to avoid.

Second, security in our courts is a separate issue. There are general concerns about people accessing judges' chambers, court rooms and court offices that must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner. There are also individual court cases that require heightened levels of security. The Sheriff's Department has skilled personnel to deal with this on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, security involves more than just our public buildings. It involves the safety of all Ramsey County citizens in their homes and their workplace. Homeland security begins by developing a comprehensive plan that looks at where we are today, where we need to go to prevent terrorism and acts of war and how to deal with them or other catastrophic events should one occur. The plan that is finally adopted will allow County staff to respond efficiently while protecting the rights and freedoms that make this country different from all others. The plan will also involve the many professionals who work in each city on a daily basis who know and understand their community.

[Return to the report menu](#)

STATE BUDGET IMPACTS

It is difficult at this time to determine what the impacts of the state's budget problems will have on Ramsey County residents because last minute decisions by the legislature always seem to change our predictions. What we do know, based on discussions in the legislature, is that there will be some cuts in services based on the cuts the state makes in each program. We will outline the impacts in the next newsletter, however, Commissioner Rettman's priorities for the county continue to focus on fiscal responsibility, maintaining a AAA bond

rating to assure the lowest cost of financing, and providing quality services to Ramsey County citizens in the most efficient and timely manner.

[Return to the report menu](#)

A SOLID WASTE PRIMER

By state mandate each county has the responsibility of managing solid waste - which includes just about everything we put in the garbage - under the following priorities:

1. Reduce the volume of waste and reuse whatever materials possible;
2. Develop effective recycling programs;
3. Compost yard and some food waste;
4. Resource recovery;
5. Landfilling that produces little or no methane gas;
6. Landfilling that produces methane gas.

Currently we use three different systems to dispose of our solid waste: **Recycling, Composting and Resource Recovery**. We recycle items that have a ready market such as cans, bottles, cardboard, newspapers and some paper. We compost leaves and yard waste such as grass clippings and soft plant material. Some of the remaining trash that we put out for collection is sent to our Resource Recovery Plant.

At the plant our "garbage" is sorted to remove glass and metals and some other items. The remaining material is made into fuel pellets that are burned to provide electrical energy. Those materials that are removed but cannot be reused, about 44% by weight, are sent to a landfill. One of our goals is to have all haulers take their collected garbage to the plant instead of to a landfill which allows us to remove usable waste and reduce the need for landfills.

While the current systems are effective for disposal, we have failed to meet the state's first mandate – Reduce. In fact, despite our best efforts to create alternatives, the volume of trash keeps going up – and up. As part of our efforts to meet our mandate County staff is in the process of reviewing a plan for what has been called public collection. In practice this would be an organized collection system managed by each municipality within the county. The benefits of this system include reduced truck traffic and more control over haulers.

The problems with it include loss of consumer choice (some people would have to change haulers), forced participation and possible elimination of some small collection companies that may not be able to compete. It will be difficult to determine what the cost to the public will be until contracts are agreed to, so at this point we do not know if there would be a cost increase, a savings or if fees would stay the same.

NOTE: For an update on the study and possible future County Board actions please see the attached letter dated April 25, 2002.

What you can do to help:

- Work on reducing your volume of trash;
- Make sure you participate in recycling programs;
- Take your yard waste to the nearest compost site or set up an appropriate composting bin in your own back yard;
- Use your clippings as mulch (just don't do this right after using weed killers);
- Use mulching mowers to put the nutrients from growth back into the soil;
- Use fertilizers that encourage root development rather than lush top growth;
- Use the same hauler as your neighbors;
- Plan your projects and then carefully choose the products you need so you do not have waste, especially hazardous materials such as paints and solvents.
- Buy products as you need them and use them immediately. Many products, such as paints and driveway sealers do not store well, especially in the garage.
- Repair rather than replace.

Rumor has it that former Editor-in-Chief of the Rettman Report, Gene Haselmann, is happily retired and doing the things he loves most. That means caring for his two beautiful grand-children, reading, walking and squeezing in an occasional vacation with his wonderful wife – most recently to Denver and Las Vegas. We don't think he'll be begging for his job back anytime soon! We wish him continued happiness anyway.

[Return to the report menu](#)

NEW STAFF ARRIVES

Mark Voerding has joined Commissioner Rettman's staff to assist in analyzing the county budget, making recommendations on issues before the County Board, creating new policy initiatives - and writing this newsletter. He brings nearly 25 years of experience working with neighborhood groups, drafting effective ordinances and analyzing city proposals. This includes over ten years working for former Saint Paul City Councilmembers Bill Wilson and Joe Collins.

[Return to the report menu](#)

RETTMAN RECEIVES AWARD

Commissioner Janice Rettman was recently presented with a 2001 Saint Paul Ambassador Community Service Award by the Saint Paul Convention and Visitors Bureau for her efforts to complete the skyway/walkway connection to the RiverCentre in downtown Saint Paul. This was a difficult process complicated by the location of Rice Park and the historic buildings around it. Proposals had included a climate-controlled walkway through the park and a skyway attached to the classic library.

The new system enters the QWEST building at the skyway level then drops by stairway, or elevator if you prefer, to a tunnel under the street and into the RiverCentre complex. This

makes it possible for visitors and downtown workers to get into the skyway without going outside in bad weather. The network of old tunnels under our streets made the link possible at limited expense. Two new skylights have been installed to let in natural light and exits to the street will be part of the system.

In response to the award Commissioner Rettman stated that "I am excited about receiving this award, but more importantly by what it represents – diverse interests coming together to complete a much-needed project."

[Return to the report menu](#)

A volunteer is needed to serve on the Ramsey County Capital Improvement Program Citizens Advisory Committee. This Committee helps establish spending priorities and makes recommendations to the County Board on funding for public improvements such as street upgrades and expenditures for park facilities. For information contact Commissioner Rettman's Office at 266-8360, or the County website at www.co.ramsey.mn.us .

[Return to the report menu](#)

SAYING GOOD BYE...

Earlier this year, we had to say good bye to **Doris Quinn**. I knew Doris for 25 years. I first met her when she worked in the City of Saint Paul's Information and Complaint Office now call the Citizen's Service Office.

Doris loved dealing with citizens, assisting them through the City and County processes, including the Court system, providing information when requested or just listening. She considered working for the City an honor and that her job was one of giving excellence to the citizen even if the answer may not be the one originally sought.

Over the years, Doris and I had the opportunity to work in many venues together. I was delighted that after she retired from the City, I could convince her to work for me and for the citizens of Ramsey County. She did and I am proud of the work she completed. There are many workers in both the City and County who can rave about her work and her excellence of service and her persistence.

Doris fought several cancers for many years. Her husband John, her daughter, her son and her friends were magnificent during her battle which she lost in January. Doris gave unconditionally to her family, friends, and community.

Doris Quinn shared a tremendous amount of faith and believed that one should live life with dignity and joy.

There hasn't been a day since Doris died that I haven't thought of her. I believe my staff and I were blessed by the opportunity to know and work with her. Doris you are missed.

Janice

[Return to the report menu](#)

April 25, 2002

Dear District 3 and/or Ramsey County Resident or Business,

First of all, thank you for contacting me or my office regarding the proposed **County Mandated Trash Collection System**.

Last year when some of the Ramsey and Washington County Commissioners requested a study exploring the development and implementation of an organized collection system to assist us in meeting state mandates regarding solid waste (trash), I demanded that there be public input on the issue. To that end, my staff and I immediately began door knocking in a number of District 3 neighborhoods on July 11. The door knocking literature piece, printed in English, Spanish, Hmong and Somalian, also asked for input.

As a part of this study, a number of meetings, forums and district council meetings were held to give you a chance to let the Board and staff know your views on trash collection. Many of you also heard from your trash haulers about the issue and responded to their letters. The public response was immediate and informative. The study is now complete and the staff recommendation is **to not proceed with organized collection at this time**.

The decision not to proceed was made simpler by the number of citizens who contacted us to express their views. Of the hundreds of letters, phone calls and e-mails I have received more than 95% were opposed. In addition, Linda, Mary and I door knocked over 4,000 homes to gather your views on collection. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of people prefer to be able to choose their hauler and many have a long-standing relationship with the one they now have. They are also overwhelmingly opposed to county involvement in this matter. It should be noted that some cities currently have their own organized collection and will continue to operate in that manner.

I agree with this recommendation. I will not support any effort by Ramsey County to institute such a program at our joint meeting today and at subsequent meetings of the Ramsey County Board. It should be noted that once we reduced the tipping fees at the Newport Facility our delivered tonnage has increased to near capacity. It is critical for me that I compliment the haulers who have used the facility from day one and encourage all of the haulers to bring their collected garbage to the Newport facility. Financially and environmentally, the Newport facility must operate at or near capacity all year around.

The number of trucks on streets and alleys may still be a problem; however, this can readily be solved by citizens on their own, with a little time and effort on their part and with no involvement from county government. Individually, you can choose the same hauler that

your neighbor has. Currently, blocks and even neighborhoods are working together to use one hauler and some haulers will assist you with this. You could also consider sharing with your neighbor to reduce expense. Cities that are concerned about truck volume and weight limits have the ability to institute a system without county involvement – or county expense.

You should also know that haulers may be asked to bill their customers for the Ramsey County Waste Management Fee which is currently a part of your property tax bill. A new fee is not being suggested. The advantage of collecting it in this manner is that customers will be charged on volume not a flat rate. If you have very little trash collected the fee may even be reduced!

Given this, issues regarding solid waste management identified by you may need to be reviewed by the County. Therefore, I will be proposing the following possible solutions to help solve some of our issues, the state mandates and the priorities that guide us:

- If requested by municipalities, create a summary abatement process under which properties receiving 2 or more citations for trash in a six-month period would receive automatic collection service from a county approved hauler for a period of two years with fees placed on the property tax bill.
- Focus efforts on increasing recycling participation including, but not limited to the possibility of requiring haulers to pick up source-separated recyclables, preferable on the same day as trash collection.
- Create a system to collect leaves and branches in the fall and spring and deliver them to a County composting location for reuse, mulching and chipping;
- Explore possibilities for collecting electronic equipment such as computers and televisions. (Some states already charge a fee at the time of purchase to deal with this problem.);
- Encourage the use of household garbage disposals or offer incentives for installing new ones in order to reduce the amount of garbage entering the waste stream.
- Create more convenient hazardous waste monthly pickups.
- Pursue alternatives for collecting/recycling plastics or reducing their use including working with the University of Minnesota and their research projects.

Finally, we should make personal efforts to reduce the amount of trash we have by recycling and planning projects to limit the amount of trash. In doing so you will help protect the environment and may be able to reduce your bill because haulers charge by volume. You will also be helping future generations by reducing the need for landfills to bury our trash.

On a personal note on behalf of my part-time staff, Mary Thoemke, Linda Jungwirth, Mark Voerding and Nancy Larson, I want to thank you for being vigilant and diligent citizens and sharing your knowledge and advice. It is indeed an honor to serve you. If you have any questions on this or other issues before the County please call my office at 651-266-8360 or e-mail me at janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us .

Respectfully,
Janice Rettman

[Return to the report menu](#)

E-Mail: janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us

[Ramsey County Home Page](#)

Author: Commissioner Rettman's Office