

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
January, February, March, April - 2003

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 letter provides you with information on some of the issues being discussed by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. The views expressed in this newsletter are mine and/or my staff's and are provided to citizens as a part of my responsibility to keep you informed on what I am doing as your County Commissioner. If I, or my staff, can be of assistance to you please call us at **266-8360** or send an e-mail to www.janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us .

Sincerely, **Janice**

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[BIFF ADAMS ARENA PARKING LOT UPDATE](#)

Local contractors will soon be bidding to construct a new parking lot for Biff Adams Ice Arena. Neighbors and users had petitioned to have the parking lot built because of traffic and parking congestion on Western Avenue but also because of safety concerns. There have been a number of close calls for children loaded with bags of hockey equipment either attempting to cross the street in traffic or simply getting out of parked vehicles on the street side. Because of the location of the main entrance to the arena visitors do not use the

crosswalks and traffic lights at Minnehaha. Ramsey County's Capital Improvement Program Committee has approved the project which is estimated to cost about \$120,000.

The lot will be located on the south (Minnehaha) side of the building and every effort will be made to save the existing trees or move them.

Commissioner Janice Rettman, who represents this area of St. Paul, stated that "Businesses are required to address their parking needs off the street and Ramsey County acknowledges its own responsibility. But we also want to be a good neighbor and provide safe access to our facilities."

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NOTES & UPDATES

Property taxes are due May 15 and October 15. If you escrow funds as part of your mortgage payment it is always a good idea to check with the County (651-266-2000) to make sure the payment has been made on time.

Watch *Ramsey Talks* on Cable Channel 18 to find out current issues before the County Board – Monday through Saturday at 9:30 A.M. & 6:30 P.M.

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WEST NILE VIRUS PRESENTS THREAT IN 2003

With the coming of spring and annual mosquito invasion local health officials have again warned about West Nile Virus. First documented in New York City in 1999, the virus causes encephalitis which is an inflammation of the brain. The virus has spread rapidly in this country with 149 cases and 18 deaths through 2001 but over 4000 cases and 274 deaths in 2002. Minnesota had 48 cases (fortunately no deaths) last year. Since the disease is only passed by mosquitoes it is only a concern during the warmer months.

Ramsey County has many lakes and wetlands that offer good places for mosquitoes to hatch but more likely sources are found in our own backyards. Once a mosquito has bitten a victim (birds, dogs or humans) they seek a place to lay eggs. The best places for eggs to develop have standing water (old tires, buckets, birdbaths, garden ponds, clogged rain gutters and old cans) or moist, rotting logs and brush. The larvae survive in ice through the winter so it is important to clean up yard sources as quickly as possible in the spring because these are also the sources that thaw first.

The first step to lowering your chances of being bitten by mosquitoes is to eliminate breeding areas throughout the year. Check your yards and remove possible sources, keep bird baths clean and change water frequently, clean the gutters (which is always a good

idea), keep pond filters clean and treat the ponds to keep them fresh. The next step is to stay indoors at dusk when the critters are most active and use repellants containing DEET.

Many bird species can be affected by the virus but crows seem particularly vulnerable. If you find a dead crow, contact the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District (651-645-9149) for instructions. While the disease cannot be spread by touch it is always a good idea to wear gloves or use a plastic bag to handle any dead bird. For

further information contact the Control District at www.mmcd.org. **Commissioner Janice Rettman** is a member of this Board.

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TRASH BILL RISING?

We have received a number of calls regarding increases in trash haulers' fees this year. Most relate to the *county charge* or *county environmental charge*. **This is not a new charge nor is it a new tax**, just a new way of doing business. In previous years the fee was paid by every property owner when you paid your property tax bill. It has been removed from the tax bill and placed on your hauler's bill because the County Board believes it better reflects the actual cost of meeting state solid waste requirements.

There are reasons why this makes sense. First, unlike a general property tax, the fee is specific to the service. Secondly, it is now volume-based so you may reduce your fee by reducing your waste. Previously, everyone paid the same fee regardless of how much trash they put out. Third, it is part of the actual cost of collecting and disposing of solid waste. Fourth, it removes the subsidy to businesses that was paid by residential property owners. This year the amount collected from residential properties will be about 10% less than collected last year. For 2003 they will pay \$46.06 vs. \$50.98 in 2002. And finally, the money collected is used to help protect the environment for future generations.

Approximately 75% of the money the County will now collect from haulers is used to support the Resource Recovery plant in Newport that separates trash, recycles glass and metals and converts most of the remainder into fuel that is burned to create electricity. The remaining 25% is used to pay for related services such as operating the County's compost and hazardous waste collection sites that are accessible to residents for "free". For additional information you may contact the county at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us> or by calling (651) 633-3279.

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DISTRICT 10 COMMUNITY FORUM

It was a lively evening at the District 10 Community Forum on February 18th. State legislators, city council members and your County Commissioner were there to answer

questions about the impact of budget cuts on the Como area but taxes, services and new initiatives were also part of the discussion.

Because of the struggling economy, revenue coming into state coffers is substantially less than anticipated causing a huge shortfall and forcing the state to use its rainy day funds and cut spending. Local legislators reminded the audience that, because they are in the minority power, it would be impossible to pass any tax increase just to maintain some of the services to the most needy. They also stated that levy limits would not permit the county to pass those costs on to the property tax.

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman reminded the community and legislators that not only are there budget problems, there will be serious property tax problems as a direct result of the changes the legislature made in the property tax code in 2001. Beginning this year (2003), the limitations on market value increases will be removed so that by the end of 2008 every property owner will pay taxes on the full estimated value. Many home owners could see huge jumps in taxes if property values have increased in their neighborhood.

Property taxes are based on value but increases were limited to just 10% each year before the change went into effect. If a particular area of the city became popular values rose significantly but actual taxes were based on limited market value thus protecting residents from roller coaster taxes. The longer an owner has been in their home, the greater the gap between limited and estimated values. (You can check your property tax statement for these values to determine where you stand.). As the gap is closed over the next couple of years under the state's formula, property taxes will rise even without a change in local spending.

The second issue that will directly impact taxes is called tax compression. Previously, owners of business property paid far higher rates than residential owners under the policy that suggests they have greater impact on the community, have value based on their ability to generate income and have a need for an educated workforce. The 2001 law changes the formula so that residential and business properties pay more equally with less regard to demand for services, environmental impacts and ability to generate income thus placing a greater burden on residential payers. Translation: increase in taxes for residential properties, decrease in taxes for commercial/industrial property.

The third issue is valuation. As the economy changes, commercial properties are likely to ask the County to reduce their values. This will place even further pressure on residential properties because they will be asked to make up the difference. Commissioner Rettman reminded those present that only the state legislature can turn these changes around.

(If you are not satisfied with your current valuation contact the County Department of Property Records & Revenue at 651-266-2000 to help with a re-assessment or an appeal to the Board of Equalization)

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[WHO IS THAT AT MY DOOR?](#)

While **Commissioner Janice Rettman** has often been seen out door knocking in the rain, snow and cold, spring seems to be one of her favorite times. She states that "Those first days of warm weather are very inspiring and I truly enjoy visiting with citizens who are getting outside for the first time after a long winter. I love to visit with people and I even get a chance to pet the dogs." The major issues that continue to be raised by citizens include the proposed state budget cuts, loss or reduction of county services, environmental issues, neighbor-hood problems and property tax increases.

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[FAREWELL TO LENDWAY'S](#)

It was a sad day indeed when another Saint Paul institution closed its doors at the end of April. Lendway's Lounge, 609 University Avenue had its last day of business on Saturday, April 26. Owners Sharon and "Iggy" Theisen called it "Customer Appreciation Day" but it may just have been an opportunity to empty the coolers while customers showed their own appreciation and support amid tears.

Times have not always been good for the bar and restaurant, especially in the late 70's through the end of the 80's when it stood next door to the Belmont Club and just a stone's throw from the Faust Theatre and other adult venues. Then a new set of concerns arose when it was announced that the police precinct station would be opened next door when, at the same time, attitudes and laws were changing dramatically about drinking and driving. In spite of this the Theisen family stayed with strong, continuous support from the neighborhood and second and even third generations of customers.

Some of you may remember the old Criterion Restaurant where Saint Paul's movers and shakers and state legislators were often found working deals during lunch. But it was Lendway's where the working people could be found. To its last day you were be able to find labor leaders, small business owners, retirees and regular working people lunching on noon specials while residents from all around Saint Paul could be found enjoying dinner and a frosty mug of beer. It was also not unusual to find Twins baseball players or team management at the restaurant when they were in town.

The restaurant, police station and other properties will be prepared for a mixed-use development that includes housing and commercial space. That project is a joint venture sponsored by the Greater Frogtown Community Development Corporation.

We wish Sharon, Iggy and their family the very best in retirement but will also look for them working at the State Fairgrounds beer garden, operated by their son, in late August.

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[GOOD NEWS AT SAINT BERNARD'S SCHOOLS](#)

That roar of celebration we heard from Rice Street in late March was the community hearing the news that Saint Bernard's Grade School will remain open. The Catholic Archdiocese had announced earlier that Saint Bernard's and Trinity schools would be reconfigured with junior high grades at one location and elementary grades at another. A massive letter writing campaign along with financial commitments from the parish, individuals and Rice Street businesses helped sway the decision in the school's favor.

The school has had some financial difficulties but most believe that they can be corrected. The decision will give the parish time to develop a plan for long-term viability. In her letter to Archbishop Harry Flynn **Commissioner Janice Rettman** reiterated what many others have always said, noting that the school is both an institution and a landmark. More importantly, however, it is one of the foundations of the Rice Street community and has been a center of activity for people of all religions.

Saint Bernard's was founded by German immigrants in 1890 and the grade school opened in 1891 with 220 students and 4 Sisters of Saint Benedict. The high school opened in 1957 and the grade school and high school were united in 1998.

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[SCHEDULING A BLOCK CLUB PARTY?](#)

Commissioner Janice Rettman is always willing to attend community events and to discuss neighborhood issues. Call ahead (266-8360) to check her schedule and to confirm that she is free on the day of your meeting or event.

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