

County Attorney adds 2 new assistants

Steele County Attorney Robert Jarrett has announced the addition of two new assistants to the Steele County Attorney's Office.



District Court Judge Joseph Bueltel performs the swearing in ceremony for Darrell Johnston, who has joined the Steele County Attorney's Office as an assistant attorney.

M. Esther Sherman and Darrell Johnston have joined the county attorney's office after being sworn in earlier this summer. Johnston

was sworn in by Judge Joseph Bueltel on July 30, while Sherman was sworn in by Judge Karen Duncan on Sept. 5.

Sherman obtained her Juris Doctor from the University of Oregon School of Law, and an LLM from New York University Law School. She has worked as a judicial law clerk for Judge Duncan since 2021.

Sherman began her career in Southern California as a certified mediator and worked with the local school district to support at-risk kids and kids involved in gang violence. She previously clerked for the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance and has a

background in writing, education, and victim advocacy.

She will primarily be taking a juvenile delinquency and child protection caseload, along with all property and finance department advice.

Johnston obtained his Juris Doctor from Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, and an MFA from the University of South Carolina. He previously worked in family law private practice and has a background as an actor, musician, and producer.

He was a panelist at the National Governor's Conference to discuss the use of film in craft-



M. Esther Sherman, left, takes the oath of office from District Court Judge Karen Duncan. Sherman is a new assistant attorney in the Steele County Attorney's Office.

ing policy, and he is an artistic director of the Denali Film Festival in Denali National Park, Ark.

Johnston will primarily be taking an adult criminal prosecution and child support caseload.



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Genesis Goerdt, right, of Ellendale, watches as her daughter Eleanor works on a coloring sheet from an activity bag she received Saturday at the Hunter Alexander Frank Memorial Event. Genesis grew up with Hunter Frank, who died in 2020. Proceeds from the event go to the Wounded Warriors Family Support organization.

Family first at Hunter Frank benefit

BY KAY FATE  
STAFF WRITER

There are as many ways to grieve as there are people grieving.

Hunter Frank's family is channeling its grief into a means to provide something they wish they'd had when he died in 2020.

He was just 20, stationed in El Salvador with the U.S. Navy.

"In a very difficult moment, when you get those uniformed officers at your door, or you get that phone call, you need somebody to turn to," said Maggi Flores, "because what do you do? Where do you go?"

She watched her husband, Brandon Flores, try to process the emotions of losing his younger brother.

It had been a one-two punch of grief

for the family: Frank died in 2020; within months, their grandfather, Bruce Frank, also died.

Bruce Frank was an avid motorcyclist. Flores was not, but he had a broken-down

little dirt bike that sat in his garage.

"He pretty much just lost himself in the garage," Maggi Flores said. He got the little dirt bike running, "and has been riding every day he can since,"



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Brandon Flores leads the way at the start of the Hunter Alexander Frank Memorial Event, which included a motorcycle ride. More than 40 motorcycles joined the ride, then returned to the Steele County Fairgrounds for the live music, silent auction, food trucks and games.

though now he rides a Harley Davidson, like his grandfather.

On the first anniversary of his brother's death, Flores made a Facebook post. He was going on a motorcycle ride in honor of his brother and welcomed all comers.

"He didn't care how many – or if any – people showed up, he was riding anyway," Maggi Flores said.

"That day, I thought it might be an annual thing," she said. "Brandon puts it out there, and he just goes out on the bike, weather permitting."

But when he returned from that first ride, "he said, 'that felt amazing.' I'm pretty sure that was a turning point for Brandon, when he truly figured out who

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Council questions autonomy of BP Utilities

BY KAY FATE  
STAFF WRITER

A question about a standard item on the Blooming Prairie City Council agenda could lead to a change in an ordinance that may be nearly 100 years old.

City Administrator Melanie Aeschliman meets each month with the various city committees – police department, fire department, EDA, planning and zoning and more – and submits her meeting minutes to the council. Her reports are typically approved without discussion.

But at the Sept. 9 council meeting, Greg Johnson said he had "a couple questions" about the monthly report from the Blooming Prairie Public Utilities Commission.

"First of all, I thought the (water) tower was empty and was going to be taken down, and then I read in the report that it's still in use? That we missed a probe that had to be ... OK," he said, stopping himself.

"This is where my frustration comes in, because we don't get that information," Johnson told Aeschliman. "I know you're going to tell me I should go to one of the utility commission's (meetings) to find that out, but maybe the head of some of these departments need to come here and tell us what's going on, too."

Not being informed – or worse, having incorrect information – is an issue, he said.

"When I tell people, 'yeah, the tower's coming down now,' ... and I'm wrong, I don't want that," Johnson said.

The old water tower in Central Park has been rescheduled for removal several times; it was expected to be taken down on Sept. 17, after the *Steele County Times* went to press.

Johnson wasn't necessarily singling out the public utilities commission for more updates.

"I mean any commission," he said. "Have Greg (Skillestad) come and talk to us once a year, or have Tony (Motl) come tell us what's going on in the city. Not every meeting, but maybe if something big is going on, or quarterly."

Skillestad is the BP Police Chief; Motl is director of BP Public Works.

Counselor Marcy Sundine agreed with the suggestion.

"People stop us and ask questions, and we're giving inaccurate information," she said.

Johnson's other question was about the recent 3% cost of living adjustment for city employees.

"This says that the (public utilities) commission has the right to not accept the 3%, and that they can do what they want? Is that correct?" he asked Aeschliman.

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Working to support families

Happy almost-Autumn from all of us at the Exchange Club Center for Family Unity (ECCFU)! We have been busy (as always!) working in many ways to provide dependable and efficient support-based parent mentoring, with the end goal being that parents can utilize our techniques to provide a safe and nurturing home. We work hard to educate and support families and the communities we serve in the prevention of child abuse.

To ensure our support for local families is unwavering, we have a



Steele Talkin'  
RYAN GILLESPIE

fundraising event right around the corner. We are excitedly planning for our fourth annual Santa Bowl fundraiser! This fun family event will take place on Saturday, Dec. 7, with many interactive and enjoyable activities for attendees.

See WORKING on A14 ►

Ellendale resident promises court battle with city

BY KAY FATE  
STAFF WRITER

"This is the first time I was able to speak on my behalf on this particular matter."

That was the opening statement from Daniel Petsinger, an Ellendale resident who has butted heads and verbally sparred with city officials for months.

He spoke at a special Ellendale City Council hearing last week to appeal an imposed fine of \$50 for violating a zoning permit within the city.

It was the third attempt at the appeal, after Petsinger pointed

out technicalities that he said prohibited the city from moving forward with the proceedings.

The council was first set to hear the appeal at its Aug. 8 meeting, but the city had not formally notified Petsinger the hearing would be that night.

Though he was present at the meeting – and knew what it was about – he protested the legality of the proceeding.

Mayor Matthew Bartsch closed the hearing, which was rescheduled for a special meeting Aug. 28.

Less than 90 seconds in to the second

hearing, Petsinger pointed out that the public notice about the meeting differed from the notice sent to him.

"I object to the continuation of this public hearing ... based on the fact that the public notice and the notice to me are on different topics," he said. "Thus, the city has failed to accurately and consistently publish the title and nature of this hearing, denying due process."

Once again, Bartsch closed the hearing.

Petsinger arrived about five minutes after Bartsch opened the third public hearing on Sept. 12, and

almost immediately took exception to the procedure.

"All of these smart remarks, gestures from council, is going to be duly noted as a violation of my rights of having proper due process," he said, though no councilor had spoken.

"Is this regarding this specific appeal, or...?" Bartsch asked, and the argument began.

"This is about all of it, right?" Petsinger responded, then rattled off a list of zoning code violations he said the city sent him.

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