

# 2021 Annual Report

# A NOTE FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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From picturesque parks and natural resource areas to popular lakes and world-class bike trails, Dane County has some of the best outdoor recreational spaces in the country. It is through the hard work and vision of our Department of Land and Water Resources that we are able to preserve these precious resources, despite the impacts posed by climate change, and ensure they remain a vibrant part of our community for many generations to come.



Initiatives we started years ago address the shared goals of combatting the climate crisis and preserving the rural character of our fast-growing county. We launched the Continuous Cover Program three years ago—converting lands into grasses and prairies to help trap carbon, reduce farm runoff, and limit erosion. To date, the effort has protected 1,600 acres of land and provides a clear template for how other communities can also address climate change impacts. We have quadrupled the program since 2019, and in 2022 we will help convert and conserve even more rural lands.

Dane County's 17,000 acres of parks and natural resource areas are not only a true commitment to enhancing our quality of life, but also reduce nutrient runoff and protect these areas from development. The prairie restoration work staff and volunteers continue to carry out each year sequesters carbon and maintains native habitat. In addition, our flood risk reduction dredging work in the Yahara River better prepares us for the real-time impacts of flooding brought about by the unpredictability of climate change rains. Our innovative clean lakes program "Suck the Muck" has another full year of work ahead removing phosphorus-soaked sludge from creeks feeding into our lakes, after we have already removed over 100,000 pounds of phosphorus since the program began in 2018.

The Department of Land and Water Resources is leading the way, not only on water quality and conservation efforts, but on addressing climate change. I want to thank the staff who work tirelessly to carry out these initiatives to protect Dane County's outdoor spaces and educate residents about the importance of our natural resources. 2021 marked another year of success, and I look forward to continuing our efforts in 2022.

**JOE PARISI**

Dane County Executive

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I recently saw a quote that was something along the lines of "a strong relationship is one where a disagreement today doesn't stop communication tomorrow." This sentiment stuck with me. A simple concept that is hard to put into practice.

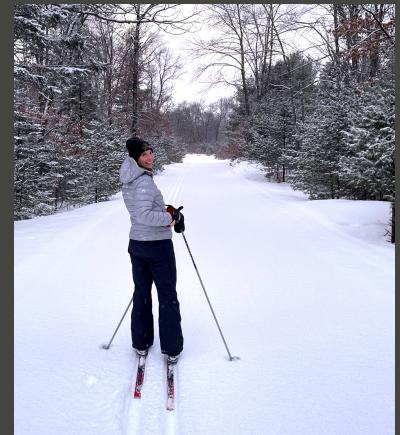
We have relationships with our colleagues and with the public that we serve. Our job is to communicate through the disagreements, to allow a diversity of opinions and thoughts, and to move forward with civility and respect.

While we redefine our work habits and communications, the natural resource challenges and disagreements flow. Do we prioritize one watershed above others? Which recreational opportunities take precedence at any given location? Do we slowly advance multiple projects simultaneously or do we hit pause on some in order to make more progress on a few? Does voluntary compliance work better than regulation?

We will never have satisfactory answers to these questions but we do have accomplishments that inspire and motivate us. Our 2021 annual report shares many of these accomplishments. The report communicates that natural resource management is happening all around us, in spite of the disagreements, and that our relationships with our colleagues and the public that we serve are getting stronger.

**LAURA HICKLIN**

Department Director



Winter fun at Dane County Parks!



Retirement celebration for Darren Marsh, former Dane County Parks Director

Cover photo credits: disc golf courtesy John Kalson; biking courtesy Samantha Haas.



Click on this icon next to a story to learn more!

# REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM i

This year the Department was awarded a US Department of Agricultural Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant for a five-year project totaling over \$1.8 million. The project is a partnership effort with other local agencies to work with agricultural producers to improve soil health and protect water quality.

Dane County received a previous five-year RCPP grant in 2015 to address phosphorus in the Yahara Watershed. This grant allows this work to continue in the Yahara Watershed and expand to agricultural producers in the Sugar River Watershed, building new partnerships and protecting valuable fishery and recreational waters of the Sugar River. Bringing partners together to address large-scale community issues is an important focus of the grant.

This project is a partnership between Dane County, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Yahara WINS, Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, and Clean Lakes Alliance.



*"Clean water and healthy soils are a priority for our community and help ensure our natural resources can be enjoyed for generations to come. It takes a committed partnership and collaboration to successfully compete for this federal grant program and have the right people working together to make the project succeed."*

Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

## A RECORD YEAR FOR CONSERVATION

Staff had a record breaking year implementing **160 contracts** encompassing a wide variety of conservation practices from grassed waterways to manure storage closures to cover crops and soil health equipment. These contracts come out to over **\$3.6 million** in funding assistance to Dane County farmers, producers, and landowners.

# URBAN WATER QUALITY GRANT ⓘ PROGRAM

This year, City of Madison was approved to receive funding for the **Bayview Townhouses and Community Center** project that once constructed, will result in an estimated reduction of **198,000 gallons** of water runoff annually.

## Project Spotlight:

The **Lincoln Street Stormwater facility** in Verona, funded in 2020, was completed in 2021. The facility was constructed to treat stormwater runoff from densely populated areas of the city that can't accommodate other types of runoff collection, such as stormwater basins. The facility receives runoff from approximately **750 acres** on the northeast side of Verona and will remove an estimated **66,993 lbs** of sediment and debris and **166 lbs** of phosphorus annually. The treated water is returned to Badger Mill Creek.



## EROSION CONTROL & STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

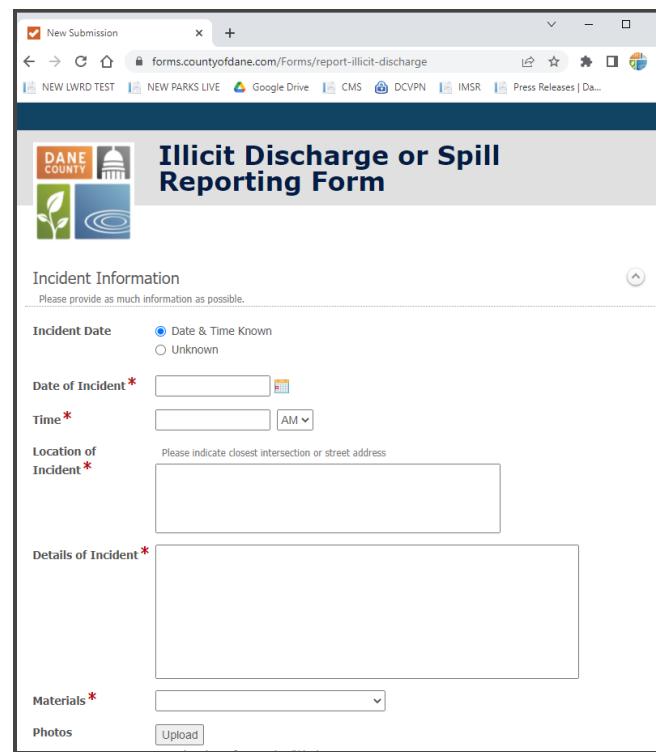
Staff issue erosion control and stormwater management permits and perform site inspections to ensure that these permits are being followed. This year, staff performed **4,348 site inspections** and took **53 enforcement actions**.

# ILLICIT DISCHARGE ORDINANCE AND REPORTING WEB PAGE

Dane County approved a new Illicit Discharge ordinance (Chapter 50) to help prevent pollution from threatening local waters. An **illicit discharge** is any discharge of a potentially polluting substance directly or through stormwater that reaches a municipal storm sewer, drainage way, wetland, waterbody or groundwater. Examples include concrete washout, dumpster leachate, chemical spills, and other potentially harmful substances. This ordinance aims to prevent and eliminate illegal discharges and gives Dane County enforcement authority county-wide.

Our website now houses a new reporting form that the public can use to report spills and pollution entering storm drains and waterways. The public can also call our office directly to file a report. Our staff are partnering with Public Health Madison/ Dane County to follow up on reports as they come in.

Residents and local businesses can help by filing a report if they see anything other than rain or snowmelt draining into a storm drain or into a local waterway.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the title 'New Submission' and the URL 'forms.countyofdane.com/Forms/report-illicit-discharge'. The page is titled 'Illicit Discharge or Spill Reporting Form' and features the Dane County logo. The form includes fields for 'Incident Information' (with a note: 'Please provide as much information as possible.'), 'Incident Date' (radio buttons for 'Date & Time Known' and 'Unknown'), 'Date of Incident\*' (input field with a calendar icon), 'Time\*' (input field with a dropdown for AM/PM), 'Location of Incident\*' (input field for address), 'Details of Incident\*' (large text area), 'Materials\*' (input field with a dropdown), and 'Photos' (input field with an 'Upload' button).

## CHAPTER 14 UPDATES

Chapter 14, the county's erosion control and stormwater management ordinance, was amended in November 2021. The amendment updated standards to help mitigate flooding by requiring peak rate control of the 200 year storm event and added runoff volume requirements for closed watersheds. Language was also included to define green infrastructure and requirements for its use on redevelopment projects.

# LAND ACQUISITIONS

## 528 Acres Permanently Protected in 2021

### **Indian Lake County Park** (292 acres)

Park expansion makes this the largest park in the system (just under 800 acres). Provides southern access to the park and expands trail options within the Ice Age National Scenic Trail Corridor.



Marsh Creek - Walking Iron land purchase

### **Walking Iron Wildlife Area and Walking Iron County Park** (173 acres)

Provides added recreational opportunities, trail connections and park access from Segebrecht Road.

### **LaFollette County Park** (1.15 acres)

Provides land for the missing link of the Yahara River Trail, that will connect the park to Skyline Drive.

### **Ice Age Trail Junction Natural Resource Area** (20 acres)

Generous bargain sale which provides a future gateway to the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, as well as adding a buffer and additional access for the highly used Madison Area Youth Soccer Association's Reddan Complex.

### **Schumacher Farm Park** (0.5 acres)

Purchase of a residential property along Hwy 19/113 that helps prevent future boundary issues and allows for more effective land management access.

### **Joyce M. Baer and George J. Socha Conservancy** (0.5 acres)

Land donation from George Socha and his late wife Joyce M. Baer that will provide a future parking area for the Conservancy and access to the Maunesha River.

### **Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Projects**

Grants awarded to Groundswell Conservancy helped protect 38 acres of land along Black Earth Creek, create a corridor for the proposed Black Earth Creek Trail, and provide another 1.3 acres of property for public access and recreational opportunities along Black Earth Creek.

# PHEASANT BRANCH CONSERVANCY SPOTLIGHT

In 2019, Dane County purchased 160 acres on the north-end of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy. The property was split into four quadrants and each year for four years staff and volunteers will spread native seeds with the goal of restoring a “Platinum Prairie” that has at least 100 different plant species. The project will provide a diverse habitat for wildlife, increase flood capacity and improve water quality. So far, two quadrants have been seeded with over 203 different species.

The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy pledged to continue fundraising with a goal of contributing \$100,000 to the project over four years. The Clean Lakes Alliance also committed to a four year total contribution of \$100,000.



Photos: mixing seed and adding it to the spreader (left); ceremonial seeding event (top right) and seed spreader (bottom right).

# LAND RESTORATION EFFORTS

Staff and volunteers are continuing restoration projects covering over **750 acres of land**, including prairie, oak savanna, oak woodland, and wetland sites. Once restored, these ecosystems will provide an incredible number of ecosystem services.

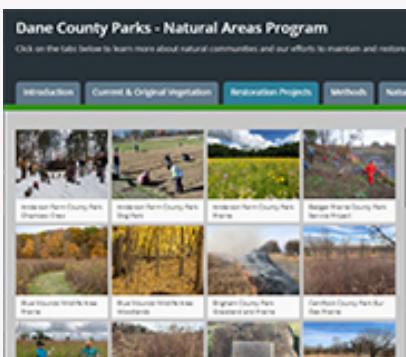
## Prairies

Prairies sequester **1/2 to 1 ton of carbon per acre per year** which is comparable to forests. The difference is that carbon is stored underground in a prairie compared to above ground in a forest. They also help soak up rain water which can help reduce flooding and recharge our groundwater supplies. Prairies also support a huge diversity of pollinators and other wildlife.

## Oak Savannas and Woodlands

Oaks trees are the backbone of our savanna and woodland communities. They support many species of wildlife, including over 800 species of caterpillar and all the birds and wildlife that feed on them. They are important for water infiltration and sequester carbon. Oak savanna was once one of the most common vegetation types in the Upper Midwest but today is highly endangered with **only a fraction of one percent remaining**. Intact oak savannas are now one of the rarest natural communities on earth.

Unlike many other native tree species, oak seedlings need plenty of sunlight to survive and grow. Without this sunlight, there is no oak regeneration and the entire community begins to unravel. Areas choked with invasive plant species block oak regeneration and provide very little benefit to wildlife which is why staff and volunteers invest so much time and energy into clearing invasive species from these ecosystems.



## Natural Areas Program Interactive Map

The Natural Areas Program aims to restore and sustain natural communities within the Dane County Park System while fostering a deeper connection to our natural resources. Check out our new interactive map to see current restoration, restoration methods, and places you can visit to see good examples of different natural communities.

# LAND RESTORATION EFFORTS

## Seed Collection | 3,390 lbs. seed collected

Our seed collection program continues to grow! This year, volunteers, staff and partners collected and processed a record breaking **3,390 pounds** of seed from **202 native species** with an estimated worth of approximately **\$1,256,000**. Volunteers contributed over **1,700 hours** to this program. This seed will be used to help restore around **300 acres of land** in Dane County. Several hundred acres of new prairies will be planted and ongoing prairie, oak savanna, and oak woodland restorations will have new species introduced to increase their biodiversity and resiliency.

## Forestry | 2,500 trees and native shrubs planted

Forestry staff had a busy year! A major highlight includes planting over **1,500 trees** on county-owned lands with the help of volunteers and partner organizations. Several summer storm events had staff out before dawn to remove downed trees and branches from trails. They also provided a number of trainings to park volunteers on tree pruning, tree planting, and other forestry topics. Two new students were added to the **Career Pathways Program**, which prepares participants for a wide variety of careers in natural resource management. Pathway students gained training on tree pruning, installation, proper watering, tree injections, equipment use, and other forestry related activities.



# YAHARA RIVER SEDIMENT REMOVAL

Dane County continued implementation of the multi-year **Yahara River Sediment Removal** project to remove accumulated sediments and improve water flow. When complete, this 11-mile sediment removal initiative will help increase the flow of water through the Yahara chain of lakes and improve the management of lake levels during high water periods. The county purchased a new "Dragon Dredge" and hired four staff positions to carry out the work. This year marked the beginning of phase 2 of the project. Phase 2 will remove sediment between Lake Waubesa and Lower Mud Lake. This section will be completed in 2022, removing approximately **65,000 cubic yards** of sediment.



## June 2021 Update

The dewatering basin for sediment removal is complete. Sediment removal in the river has started.



## July 2021 Update

The crew works to clear a channel in the McFarland area upstream of Mud Lake.

# PARK UPGRADES

Below are highlights of some park development and trail expansion projects:



## Phil Van Valkenberg CamRock to Glacial Drumlin Connector Trail

After 15 years of planning and development, a groundbreaking event was held to celebrate the beginning of work on a nearly 4 mile trail that will connect CamRock County Park and the Glacial Drumlin State Trail.



## 'Beer Cave' Restoration

Volunteer, Richard Moen, has completed the majority of the restoration on a historic "beer cave" located within CamRock County Park. The beer cave is actually a stone-covered cellar that was used in the 1800s by a brewery in Rockdale before refrigeration.



## Memorial Sculpture

A metal art sculpture was installed in Anderson Farm County Park in memory of Gary Kalscheur, a park neighbor and active volunteer. The sign was donated by Gary's wife, Jann Kalscheur. It was designed by his sister-in-law, Jacky Graves, and made by Prairie Art Metal.



## North Mendota Trail

Construction is underway on the section of the North Mendota Trail through Governor Nelson State Park. Dane County Parks operations staff installed the trail's stone base and completed the landscaping last fall. Paving should be completed summer 2022.

Photos: Glacial Drumlin Connector trail courtesy Amber Gerber/Adams Publishing Group. Memorial sculpture courtesy Mike Kuhn.

## ANDERSON DOG PARK i SPOTLIGHT

Dane County Parks opened a new dog park at Anderson Farm County Park, located in the Town of Oregon. The 36-acre dog park includes perimeter fencing with a separate small dog area, limestone hiking trails through restored prairie, two paved parking lots with electric vehicle charging stations, a stormwater basin, restrooms, and an edible orchard. A new paved trail also connects the new dog park with the existing Arthur Sholts Memorial Woods and the Village of Oregon.



*"This newest dog park is the third largest dog park in our system and makes a total of 268 acres where dogs and their owners can make friends and be active off-leash."*

Joleen Stinson, Interim Parks Director

## SOLAR-POWERED PARK i SPOTLIGHT

A new solar system was completed at William G. Lunney Lake Farm County Park creating the county's first solar-powered park and campground. The system has more than **460** **solar panels** located on four structures: two new solar shelters, the Lussier Family Heritage Center, and the campground shower house. In total, the system provides about 90% of the electricity used across all site activities. The project received an Outstanding Park Design Award from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association.



# HEALTHY PARKS, HEALTHY YOU

This was the first year of a new three year Healthy Parks, Healthy You initiative. The goal is to increase community awareness of the connection between parks and nature to mental, physical, and emotional health and to build a greater familiarity and comfort with our county parks and outdoor spaces. In 2021 the partnership hosted two Covid-19 Vaccines in the Park clinics, an Earth Day event, and had information and tables set up at three park Friends Group events, including the Donald Dash and a candlelight hike at Anderson Farm County Park.



Healthy Parks, Healthy You is a partnership between the Foundation for Dane County Parks, SSM Health, Dean Health Plan and Dane County Parks.

## SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

### Dane County Parks Volunteers and Events

This year over **1,600 volunteers** donated more than **47,000 hours**. These numbers reflect the community's strong commitment to our parks. Twenty Friends Groups and partners helped staff keep trails and park lands open and accessible through the continuing struggles brought on by Covid-19 in 2021.

### The Foundation for Dane County Parks, Inc.

The Foundation supports the park system and fundraises for the Dane County Parks Endowment Fund held by the Madison Community Foundation. The Endowment is now nearly **\$800,000**. In 2021, the Foundation awarded over **\$16,500** in grants to nine local nonprofit conservation organizations to help them provide educational programming, interpretation and enhanced volunteerism in parks. They also sponsored the Dane County Parks volunteer capacity building training series with a \$9,000 donation.



Photo far right courtesy Steve Dahlgren

# YOUTH INITIATIVES

Our Lussier Family Heritage Center Facility offers a growing number of educational programs and events for both youth and adults. Some of these are described below.



## **Junior Naturalist**

Sponsored by American Family Dreams Foundation and the Foundation for Dane County Parks, this program focuses on exploring natural resources, data collection, wildlife identification and citizen science through hands-on learning. In summer 2021 we led two, 4-week sessions with 15 youth per session, grades 7 – 9.



## **Girls Inc. Partnership**

This year we launched new partnerships with Girls Inc. and the Goodman Community Center to provide camping experiences for over 60 youth. There were four sessions total for two nights of camping each session. We also provided outdoor recreation and environmental education experiences during their stay.



## **Get Outside**

In the third year of this program, kids from four community centers were able to visit the Heritage Center one to two times a month for outdoor and environmental education programming. Activities included fishing, biking, snowshoeing, and other outdoor recreation and exploration.



## **Youth Environmental Leadership Experience**

In the second year of this program, 15 high school students participated in a five-week virtual summer program that encouraged peer support and a minimum of 120 minutes per week spent outside. Two interns from the Boys & Girls Club assisted staff with this program.

This year we also launched a summer field trip program, hosted independent nature activities (such as the StoryWalk® and scavenger hunts), and held a Natural Areas Art Contest providing \$500 scholarships to three local youth).

## YOUTH VOLUNTEERS FOR CONSERVATION SPOTLIGHT i

In the fall of 2021, we launched a brand new program for high school students called **Youth Volunteers for Conservation** that has grown quickly. It is a hands-on program that challenges students to make a real impact in caring for Dane County's natural areas. It is led by an 8 student leadership council that helps guide the program and spread the word to other local students.

Since the program began last year, **54 students** from 18 different high schools have participated donating **238 hours** to help protect and improve our natural spaces. Students can sign up for workdays throughout the year and get hands on experience with conservation work.



## YOUTH ADVENTURE PROGRAMS & FIELD TRIPS i SPOTLIGHT

Last summer we also launch a new Youth Adventure Program series and field trips for kids in kindergarten through 8th grade. Programs include biking, fishing, aquatic investigations, and sessions focused on learning about prairies and animal survival.

**Field trips** can be booked for anyone looking to bring a group out for an adventure.

**Youth adventure programs** are offered throughout the year for individuals to sign up.



## RIPPLE EFFECTS

There are many practices that reduce and improve stormwater runoff into Dane County lakes, rivers and streams. Ripple Effects, a joint program between our department and the Madison Area Municipal Stormwater Partnership, educates residents about easy actions they can take to protect Dane County waters.

### Leaf-free Streets

In the fall, removing leaves from the street before it rains can help keep phosphorus from entering our waterbodies. This year, rain alerts went out to **534 text** subscribers and **423 email** subscribers before rain events reminding them to remove leaves from the street. One hundred people also displayed yard signs to help educate neighbors.

### Plant Dane

The annual plant sale sold **19,797 discounted native plants** to Dane County residents. Additionally, **4,026 free native plants** were distributed through the free plants program. These plants are donated to school and community organizations through the plant sale or grown by volunteer native plant growers.

## NEW SUMMER "IN THE PARK" SERIES

This summer we launched a new "In the Park" series featuring a wide variety of events for individuals and families. This included:

- **9** yoga in the park sessions
- **6** art in the park events
- **3** outdoor movies
- **18** youth story time gatherings (6 in Spanish)
- **10** presentations featuring an environmental, conservation, natural resources, or sustainability featured speaker.

Over 600 people attended our summer events.



# NEW FACILITY NAMED IN HONOR OF FORMER PARKS DIRECTOR

A 4 acre property was purchased adjacent to the existing Robertson Road park operations facility to support the growth and expansion of our parks system. The property serves as the base for park operations staff and houses park maintenance and lake management equipment. The newly expanded property was renamed the Darren Marsh Parks and Lake Management Facility to honor former Parks Director Darren Marsh who retired in July after nearly 30 years working for the Dane County Park System.

During his time as Parks Director, the Dane County Parks system expanded from approximately 5,600 acres to approximately 15,000 acres of land with an additional 2,800 acres in permanent easements.



## THANK YOU PHOTOGRAPHERS



**Sevie Kenyon**  
Staff Photographer



**Steve Dahlgren**  
Volunteer



**John Kalson**  
Volunteer



**Samantha Haas**  
Volunteer

We had a number of volunteer photographers step up this year to help us capture images of our parks, programs and land and water recreational activities. Thanks to them, we have been better able to highlight our work and opportunities for the public to get out and explore. Check out some of their photos on our new [Flickr page](#). 

# WELCOME NEW FULL-TIME STAFF!



**Stener Knutson**  
Park Ranger



**Sammi Boyd**  
Park Ranger



**Ryan Brockner**  
Dredge Laborer



**Amy Warner**  
Clerk III



**Paul Eder**  
Clerk III



**Kevin Seng**  
Conservation  
Technician



**Collin Roland**  
Hydrologic  
Technician



**John Seid**  
Park Maintenance  
Technician



**Clint Clemens**  
Heavy Equipment  
Operator



**Jaime Salazar**  
Lead Dredge  
Operator

The following staff were also hired into new roles: Lacie Roberts (Park Maintenance Technician); Frank Fosdal (Mechanical Repair Worker); Steve Herbrand (Crew Leader)

## AWARDS & RECOGNITION

**Dane County Parks** won the “Torchbearer’s Award” from the Wisconsin Chapter of the Sierra Club.

**Dane County Parks** won the “Park Design Award (\$500,000 - \$999,999 category)” from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association for Dane County’s First Solar Powered Park.

The **Land & Water Resources Department** won the “Largest average Donor Gift (Department Size: 26-100 employees)” from the Community Shares of Wisconsin City County Employee Combined Campaign.

## RETIREMENTS

- Connie Curran
- Tina Kilgore
- Rhea Stangel-Maier
- Darren Marsh
- Tom Pulvermacher
- Conrad Richer

*Thank you for your  
many years of service!*