



**JOHNSON CREEK**  
Crossroads With A Future

# The Creek

**News from the Crossroads**

Jan 2019

## CELEBRATE 2018; WELCOME 2019 by Kyle Ellefson & John L. Swisher

Johnson Creek had another strong year and the trend appears 2019 will be the same. In 2018, we saw several personnel changes, the beginning of major projects, a successful budget process, and a completed a major strategic planning effort. As we get ready to charge into 2019, it is a great opportunity to see what has been accomplished this past year.

Personnel changes were a continuing theme in 2018, as the Village Board made great efforts to maintain and enhance our workforce. Very early in 2018 saw two new faces joining the Village. Abby Armour took the reins as Library Director after Luci Bledsoe retired, and Tourism Director Katie Newcomb has developed a tourism program nearly from scratch. This summer, Street Superintendent Lee Trumpf retired after 21 years of service. The Village was able to consolidate supervision of the public works and utility departments into one position which Public Works Director Aric Mindemann now oversees. This consolidation allowed more front-line employees in place to keep pace with the wide variety of tasks it takes to keep the Village and our utilities running smoothly. Scott Barnhardt was selected as the new public works employee this summer and is doing a fantastic job. To complete the transition, the Village will hire a utility staff member in early 2019. Finally, Village Clerk/Treasurer Heather Rupnow recently left for a position in the Village of Sullivan, where she had

previously worked for several years before joining Johnson Creek in late 2017. That vacancy was filled when Deputy Clerk/Treasurer Sandra (Sam) Bell was appointed just a few weeks ago. We are very thankful for all staff that work here now, and in the past, because it is through the collective contributions of each that drives us forward in a strong, productive manner.

The Village Board's long-standing commitment to fire protection and emergency services was evident during 2018 and will continue into 2019. We often compete against family obligations, regular full-time employment, and the draw of other Fire/EMS competitors to fill these important positions. To stay competitive and retain EMS staff, as well as provide attractive incentives to prospective employees, the Village increased total EMS wages mid-year by 27%. In addition, the Village Board dedicated significant funding to obtain a new rapid response water rescue craft, turnout gear, pagers, and heaters for Station 1. The Board also purchased a new ambulance in December, making an important replacement in our fleet and providing the newest technology such as an auto-load cot system which helps prevent staff injuries.

The Village Board had a change in 2018 when Mike Saindon was appointed to fill an open seat in June. Mike jumped in and has quickly become a great contributor.

Within a month or so of Mike joining the Village Board, they addressed the final steps to complete the Village's strategic plan. Although the process was complex and involved massive planning and financial analysis, the Village Board adopted a plan that identifies projects and equipment to fund, when they will occur, and how to pay after considering overall financial obligations. The Board also continues to address priorities from the Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2017, supporting the reuse of the former high school and addressing the growing need for senior housing.

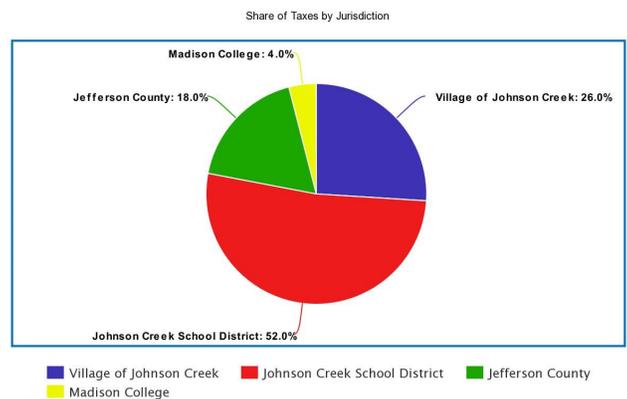
Committees and Commissions provide Village guidance and leadership and have also made important progress this year. The Library Board, with new Library Board President Tim Semo, made "Luci's Children's Corner" a reality after working closely with Lyle Wuestenberg and several other major donors. This project salutes the work and dedication of retired Library Director Luci Bledsoe and provided a much-needed update for the children's area. Although most people don't see the work they do, the Police & Fire Commission also worked hard to keep good things going and make improvements. Police & Fire Commission President Mike Lund and the other Commissioners adopted policies required by law, but also crafted them in such a way so they may be functionally applied in a community our size.

## TAXES

by Kyle Ellefson

Tax bills were sent out Mid-December, and property owners should have received them by this time. The Village portion of the tax bill, the only section the Village has control over, was good news as the Village was able to reduce the tax rate slightly. This is the fourth year in a row the mil rate has decreased or stayed the same while maintaining service levels, something that is not easy to do as expenses have been generally rising.

Overall, the tax bills for most property owners increased as each of the other taxing jurisdictions appearing on the property tax bill increased their tax rate. If you have questions about any of the taxing entities after you review the property tax bills, I would encourage you to reach out to them.



## CELEBRATE 2018 (CONT FROM PAGE ONE)

Another achievement during 2018 was the work progress on our major wastewater treatment plant renovation. The project is more than half completed. Upgrades will replace outdated processes with new technologies to handle higher daily processing volumes. Construction has been going quickly, and we anticipate transitioning the plant once the weather warms up this spring. By fall of 2019, the project should be complete, and the site restored to a finished condition. Although this project required a large financial commitment, the Village was able to secure more than \$650,000 in grants to reduce the loan principal and improve operational sustainability measures. Incorporating these grant funds is a great thing for ratepayers and reflects the Village Board's commitment to keep utility costs in check and keep rate increases to a minimum.

Our TIF districts continue to perform very well and are on track to be fully repaid before their mandatory termination date, likely closing in 2022. Our TIF districts strengths have brought great development to the community. When districts close, they will add significant revenue to the Village, School District, and County, thus strengthening our financial position. We are still exploring options to establish the next TIF district and continue to speak to local and state leaders about the most effective

way to address the issue.

As we wrap 2018, we are excited to see what 2019 will hold for the Village of Johnson Creek. We expect the senior housing project to break ground shortly, adding assisted living capacity, as well as bringing jobs to our community. We hope to see additional commercial and industrial growth and believe there is a need for a developer to begin planning a new subdivision. Please know the Village Board will make sure any development is well thought out and is the right fit for our community. In 2019, we plan to continue our pursuit of the Comprehensive Plan goals, work with existing local businesses to promote economic growth, possibly get more definitive information to understand the options and costs of the transportation priorities, as well as continue our pursuit of a local grocery store and pharmacy. We have had several great years of growth as a community, and we have put pieces in place to support continued growth in 2019 and beyond.

## NEW CLERK/TREASURER: SAM BELL



Johnson Creek Clerk/Treasurer  
Sam Bell

The Village is happy to share a familiar face, Sam Bell, has accepted the clerk/treasurer position. Bell has been with the Village since March 2016 serving as deputy clerk/treasurer.

Prior to joining Johnson Creek, Bell was the deputy treasurer in Fort Atkinson for 5 years and also has over 25 years of account-

ing and finance experience working in the private sector in a variety of positions within construction, retail, and banking.

"Being a clerk/treasurer was my goal after entering the municipal world," said Bell "With the timing, I felt this position was meant to be for me now; to be in a smaller community that is growing."

Bell lives in Fort Atkinson with her husband of 31 years, Tony, and has two children, one grandson, and a soon-to-be son-in-law in May.

As the clerk/treasurer, Bell will be in charge of overseeing the new deputy clerk/treasurer, preparing and helping facilitate monthly board meetings and planning meetings, participating in budget preparations and financial monitoring, tax preparations, running elections, and other duties as assigned.

"We are thrilled Sam has accepted the position and look forward to her spreading her wings and know she brings a depth of experience to the position," said Village President John L. Swisher.

"I really like the people I work with," Bell mentioned. "I like to be a part of a fast-growing community and growing with it."

## WINTER'S HERE: PREVENTING FROZEN PIPES

The Department of Public Works would like to share the following helpful tips to avoid frozen pipes this winter:

- Locate the main shut off valve in your home prior to freezing weather to make sure it operates freely and drain outside faucets by shutting off the valve inside and allowing remaining water to drain out.
- Basements or crawl spaces must be heated enough to protect plumbing. Any opening to the outside should be closed and properly insulated to eliminate cold air reaching pipes.
- If your meter or interior plumbing are near outside walls or the foundation, insulation should be installed to

prevent freezing. If you decide to wrap any pipes in heat tape or use heat cables, use only UL listed products and carefully follow manufacturers instructions.

- If you had problems in the past with frozen pipes, it may help to leave a small amount of water running during periods of extreme cold.
- If you are away from your home for a night or two, keep the thermostat at a reasonable temperature to ensure all areas with water pipes are kept above freezing. If you are away for several weeks or months, shut off the water and drain the entire system. Call a plumber for proper procedures.

## RESIDENT SPOTLIGHT: LES AND ROBERTA GRAY



*Les and Roberta Gray*

Hidden heroes. They are what separates fine communities from extraordinary. Les and Roberta Gray exemplify what it means to make a difference in your community and help make Johnson Creek a truly exceptional Village to live and raise a family.

The Grays came to Wisconsin 37 years ago when Les accepted a position with the Johnson Creek High School as their English teacher and football coach. Moving from Michigan in the early 1980s, The Grays found a more diverse business community where professions and lives weren't tied to the automotive industry. They found the friendly community they were looking for to raise their family.

Their sons Nick and Nate grew up and attended Johnson Creek High School. When the boys were old enough, Roberta went back to teaching as well and began working in the elementary school as a first grade teacher and later for kindergarten. Both Les and Roberta retired in 2012 after a respective 31 and 25 years of teaching. They continue to serve as substitute teachers in Johnson Creek when needed.

"It has been fun to be a teacher in this community where you had a student early in your career, and then taught their son or daughter as well," said Les. "To see the look on the faces of kids when you say, 'I taught your mom or dad,' are great moments," Les continued.

Teaching is the noblest of professions and Les and Roberta certainly made positive impressions on many students who attended Johnson Creek schools.

But it's their work outside of school that makes the Grays stand out.

Both Les and Roberta are active with organizations that serve so many behind the scenes. These organizations include Les' involvement with creating American Legion Baseball in Johnson Creek, both Les and Roberta's work with helping establish Hoops, Inc. (a parent-run basketball league for 5th & 6th graders), serving as buyers for the Johnson Creek Food Pantry, providing bible study to residents at Sunset Ridge, and clean up efforts with the Johnson Creek Cemetery Association.

Les' work with the Jefferson County Literacy Council, teaching English as a second language, brought rewarding moments. "After teaching and befriending a recent student, Art, I was fortunate to attend his citizenship ceremony and treasure that experience," said Les.



*Gray's Family Photo Album with granddaughters*

"We've been so fortunate to have met wonderful people in Johnson Creek who have become our mentors and friends," said Roberta. "Many think retirement is a time when some slow down," said Les. "But our calendars are full. Johnson Creek is small enough that if you want to be involved to help others, you can. There are so many opportunities here to get that rewarding feeling. It's here for you," remarked Les.

## TOURISM: WHAT'S HAPPENING IN JOHNSON CREEK

As 2019 begins, Tourism Director Katie Newcomb celebrates her first anniversary with the Village. Prior to joining Johnson Creek, Newcomb held several marketing and public relations positions with tourism attractions in Wisconsin and California; including her tenure with the Milwaukee Brewers, Milwaukee Public Museum, Betty Brinn Children's Museum, Chamber Theatre, and the Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa, California. She currently serves as the secretary for the Jefferson County Tourism Council, is on the board of the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, is the co-chair of the Route of the Badger economic development and marketing committee, and volunteers with various other nonprofits. She currently lives in Oconomowoc with her two sons.



*Johnson Creek Tourism Director Katie Newcomb*

During her first year as tourism director, Newcomb helped create the new tourism website: [www.visitjohnsoncreek.org](http://www.visitjohnsoncreek.org) and Facebook page @VisitJohnsonCreekWisconsin, helped secure Johnson Creek's feature on Discover Wisconsin in 2020, and created a branding and awareness campaign for 2019. "Johnson Creek has such a rich history of friendly and

hard-working neighbors. Everyone has made me feel so welcome" said Newcomb.

Wisconsin Farm Tech Days is coming to Johnson Creek July 23-25, 2019 at the Walter Grain Farms site. The event draws nearly 40,000 visitors every year and Newcomb anticipates all will enjoy the uniqueness of Johnson Creek. "We are a charming community with big ideas and we aim to deliver," said Newcomb.

Be on the lookout for more tourism info on our website.

### JANUARY EVENTS



**January 4-26:** Wisconsin Farms Oral History Project Exhibit, *The Lands We Serve*, at Village Hall

**January 17:** *The Lands We Serve* Community Conversation at the Johnson Creek Community Center

**Mondays**

8:45 am-2 pm

Quilters Club

JC Community Center

**Tuesdays**

12-4 pm

Seniors Club

JC Community Center

**2nd & 4th Wednesdays**

1-2:30 pm

Crafting & Coloring Club

JC Public Library

Check out our tourism website: [visitjohnsoncreek.org](http://visitjohnsoncreek.org), as well as our Facebook page for all updates and event photos!

## LIBRARY UPDATES

### New Library Board Members

The board thanks outgoing board member Kris Blakeley for her seven years of service and welcomes new board member Kelly Vlastnik.

### 2018 Milestones

- Over 31,300 items circulated – almost a 5% increase over 2017
- Added 2,000+ items to the collection
- Over 2,600 people attended programs
- Over 13,000 people visited the library
- 148 new patrons signed up for library cards

## VILLAGE HALL HOURS, STREET PARKING

### Street Parking

Please be aware street parking is prohibited during the following:

- Snow emergencies
- From 2:30-7 a.m. when there is an inch or more of snow accumulation or any ice accumulation before 10 p.m.
- When the streets and alleys are not cleared either curb-to-curb or edge-to-edge of the pavement of 1 inch or more of snow accumulation or ice accumulation.

### Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Village Hall will be closed on Monday, January 21 to observe Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

### January Committee of the Whole

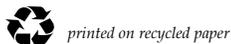
There is a location change for the January Committee of the Whole meeting. It will be held at the Village Police Department meeting room, 119 Depot Street.

Please contact Village Hall if you have any questions, (920) 699-2296.



## Village of Johnson Creek

[www.johnsoncreek-wi.us](http://www.johnsoncreek-wi.us)



## FIRE DEPARTMENT UPDATES

### Ambulance Unit 704 Retires After 20 Years Of Service



Ambulance Unit 704 is being retired after 20 years of service. Since joining the Village in 1998, Unit 704 has seen many changes in the growing Village and has grown with it.

In the first 10 years of service, it was Johnson Creek's primary ambulance and ran approximately 3,500 calls; including some of the most severe accidents on the road, in industries, at farms, and recreational based. But there are distinct rewarding moments for Unit 704 and its crews over the years, including three live births, which can be noted with the three storks featured on the unit itself.

After Unit 703 was acquired in 2008, Unit 704 served as the second run unit and was called on approximately 10% of calls to help with the most severe

cases. It also was upgraded in 2010 to meet the EMS' Paramedic status.

The new Unit 704 ambulance arrived in Johnson Creek in mid-December 2018.

### Adopt A Hydrant

The Johnson Creek Fire Department wishes to remind residents that with winter comes snow. And with snow comes covered fire hydrants. If you live near a fire hydrant, please consider being its caretaker in the winter and shovel snow away from it.

During a fire it is essential for firefighters to have clear access to hydrants to mitigate any lost time to save homes and lives.