

The *Semcac Review*



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March 2010

Semcac says farewell to executive director

Terry Erickson, executive director of Semcac, tendered his resignation at the Semcac Board of Directors' meeting on February 8. Erickson has served as the organization's top executive since October 2004.

The fifth executive director in the agency's 44-year history, Erickson will be remembered for his leadership of the organization following the devastating August 2007 flood that damaged several of the agency's Rushford facilities, including the administrative office, a senior dining site and two apartment buildings. Under his guidance, the agency rehabilitated the first two of these facilities



and will rebuild one apartment complex later this year. Semcac also took a lead role in flood recovery efforts for individual households in the region, administering several state and local programs to assist disaster victims.

Terry's goodbye

This will be my last chance to say a few words before leaving my job as Semcac's Executive Director. First and foremost, I want to say thank you to the Semcac Board and all the wonderful staff at Semcac. You have enriched my life in so many ways and I am grateful for the opportunity to have been able to serve and support the good work we do at Semcac.

During my tenure, Semcac had the unfortunate experience of experiencing a 500-year flood event that wiped out our administrative office in Rushford. Despite the hardships of this period in our history we actually did make lemonade out of lemons as the saying goes, by accepting the challenge to rebuild our damaged facilities and taking a leadership role in southeastern Minnesota flood recovery efforts. Another major

(**Goodbye**, page 8)

More recently, Erickson has led the agency through growth in programming brought on by the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act. With this funding, the agency stepped up to assist in economic recovery efforts by weatherizing many more homes in the region and delivering additional outreach and emergency services.

Erickson's last day will be May 3. He has no firm plans for the future but looks to enjoy time in Tucson with family and plans more biking in the Black Hills. He stated that he will miss his job, especially his faithful department directors who stayed with him through the tough times.

Visit
www.semcac.org
to view the agency's redesigned website, read current Semcac news and sign-up for e-news.

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Minnesota Weatherization recognized as national top performer

Minnesota's Weatherization Assistance Program and Community Action Agencies were recognized by the U.S. Department of Energy for high performance in weatherizing homes for those who qualify. Minnesota ranks in the top states for performance to date on putting increased federal weatherization funds to work for residents. A federal official said Minnesota is a national leader in weatherization and serves as a role model for other states.

Semcac's Executive Director, Terry Erickson, said, "I am very proud of Semcac's Weatherization team for doing its part in helping the state's Weatherization Assistance Program receive a top performer award from the U.S. Department of Energy. Minnesota has a terrific reputation for administering effective programs and providing services to help low-income residents. Much work remains to be done, but it's a great honor for the state's program to be nationally recognized for its extra efforts."

Minnesota received \$132 million in federal stimulus funds for weatherization work on the homes of qualified residents. The special stimulus funding has enabled Semcac and other Community Action Agencies to weatherize additional homes—the

state's goal is 17,000 homes over two years. About 3,000 homes are normally weatherized in a year. The goal of the Weatherization Assistance Program is to reduce energy costs for low-income families, particularly for the elderly, people with disabilities, and children, by improving the energy efficiency of homes while ensuring residents' health and safety.

The Weatherization Assistance Program's statewide expansion has also created more jobs in the last year. Erickson said, "Due to the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act's focus on energy-related programs, Semcac alone has hired ten full-time positions in Weatherization, including four crew members, four energy auditors and two office personnel. Furthermore, in order to meet its tremendous goal of 1,600 homes over the next two years, Semcac Weatherization has eight private contractors completing projects throughout the region, and in some cases, these contractors have hired new employees as a result of this work."

Weatherization creates 52 direct jobs and 23 indirect jobs for every \$1 million invested. Weatherization measures reduce national energy demand by the equivalent

of 18 million barrels of oil per year.



Left: Arnie Anderson, Executive Director of the MN Community Action Partnership, greeted the crowd on January 13 before representatives from the U.S. Dept. of Energy presented state officials and leaders of MN Community Action Agencies with a top performer award for their efforts in rolling out the Weatherization Assistance Program's expansion.

ARRA provides work for local contractors

In addition to weatherizing many more homes in Southeast Minnesota over the next two years, Semcac Weatherization is also administering American Recovery & Reinvestment Act funding for the repair or replacement of mechanical systems in the homes of qualified applicants.

Since December, Semcac Weatherization has worked with over 45 mechanical contractors to complete energy-related repair or replacement projects, such as furnaces, water heaters, duct work, boilers and more. Several contractors have commented on how much this work has meant to their business.

Christianson Plumbing & Heating in Albert Lea wrote:

“The programs with stimulus money, federal energy tax credits, ARRA funding for furnaces, boilers, etc. are and have been extremely helpful to our business. These programs have had a plural effect—first people who truly need help are getting their mechanical needs met and second we are able to keep our entire staff in employment.”

Brad Woxland from Woxland Plumbing & Heating in Rushford said:

“The jobs from Semcac have really benefitted our company this winter. The furnace business is very slow due to little new construction, so these repair or replacement jobs have been a life saver—not only for the customers but for small furnace contractors as well.”

Semcac Weatherization expects to continue this project into 2012, but it will depend on demand and funding availability. Applicants of the Energy Assistance Program are screened for participation in this initiative based on their household’s energy consumption and their interest in receiving weatherization services.



Join the movement!

The goal of A Minnesota Without Poverty is to build, organize and mobilize a state-wide movement to end poverty in Minnesota by 2020.

The movement is rooted in *A Common Foundation: Shared Principles for Work on Overcoming Poverty*, which was signed in 2004 by 35 religious leaders in the state who committed themselves to the principles outlined in the document (go to www.mnwithoutpoverty.org to read *A Common Foundation*). The MN Legislative Commission to End Poverty also utilized these principles when it was established in 2006. The Commission’s final report dated January 2009 gives realistic and obtainable steps that will take *all of our efforts* to end poverty in Minnesota—read the report at www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/lcep/index.htm. A Minnesota Without Poverty asks:

If Not We, Then Who?

If Not Now, Then When?

New program to prevent homelessness

Semcac’s Outreach Services has seen a significant increase in requests for housing and other emergency assistance over the past year. Late last fall, the agency began the Homeless Prevention & Rapid Rehousing Program, funded by the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act. This temporary program, expected to operate through mid-2011, can provide financial assistance and stabilization services to keep those at imminent risk of becoming homeless in their current rental housing or re-house those that are homeless. Eligible households lack financial resources and support needed to obtain housing or remain in their housing and have no other appropriate housing options identified. Households undergo an intensive initial assessment to ensure they meet program criteria and are likely to achieve permanent housing as a result of the program. Call your local Semcac contact center for more information.

New facilities improve customer service

Semcac recently celebrated the opening of new facilities in Kasson and Rushford.

Over 60 community members visited the new location of the Dodge County Contact Center and Food Shelf during an open house on January 8. The new site opened in November at 20 East Veteran's Memorial Highway in Kasson. Office manager Marty Pogalz said, "Our clients continue to comment on the easier access to the office and the more space to maneuver through the food shelf. After visiting the office and shopping through the food shelf, the many positives of the new location really come to light for people."

On January 22, about 100 people attended an open house at Semcac's newly renovated Tenborg Center at 113 E. Jessie Street in Rushford. The building houses the Rushford Food Shelf and a Senior Dining site and kitchen. The Rushford Food Shelf began serving local residents from the Tenborg Center in November. Senior Dining served its first meal there on January 4 and has also resumed preparing meals from the Tenborg kitchen for the Houston and La Crescent Senior Dining sites and local Meals on Wheels deliveries. The Tenborg Center is again a viable space to benefit the community.



Reception area in Kasson



Food Shelf in Kasson



Senior Dining in Rushford

The effects of hunger can range from poor health and slowed recovery from injury or illness to poor performance at school or work. From 2008 to 2009 Minnesota saw a 25 percent increase in food shelf visits—the largest recorded increase in 28 years. Semcac's four food shelves helped 1,110 households with supplemental or emergency food in 2009.

During March the annual statewide FoodShare campaign promotes the collection of food and funds for the state's food shelves. As an official participant in this campaign, Semcac's food shelves will receive a percentage of the undesignated



statewide FoodShare funds. The amount of food and money raised locally during March and on the number of people served during the remainder of the year determines Semcac's allocation. Please donate funds,

food and personal care items to your local food shelf during March. *And thank you for your support!*

Semcac four food shelves are open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

Dodge County Food Shelf—634-4350

Houston County Food Shelf—725-3677

Preston Food Shelf—765-2761

Rushford Food Shelf—864-8224

Volunteer Driver Program introduces new guidelines

Transportation Director Erlene Welshons
1-800-944-3874

Several factors are driving changes in the way Semcac's Volunteer Driver Program (VDP) coordinates rides for its participants, who are either clients of Medical Assistance, Blue Ride or U-Care or are seniors age 60 and over who use the program on a donation basis.

The first factor is a proposed change in the interpretation of a Medical Assistance rule. MA may no longer reimburse the program for the miles when no passenger is in the driver's vehicle ("unloaded" miles). Counties have agreed to temporarily cover this reimbursement for volunteer drivers, but the future is unknown.

The second factor is increasing costs with stagnant grant funding and lagging participant contributions. The program receives a grant from the South East Minnesota Area Agency on Aging to supplement the donation-based senior rides. The grant amount has not changed in more than ten years, yet program costs have risen dramatically. For instance, in 2003 volunteer drivers were reimbursed \$0.36 per mile and drove 48,459 miles to get seniors to their appointments. In 2009 the volunteers were reimbursed \$0.55 per mile and drove 96,362 miles. Thus, the program had a \$35,554 in-

crease in mileage reimbursement expenses within six years; and no increase in grant funding.

The VDP hopes the following new guidelines will improve the current situation:

- 1) Clients of MA/Blue Ride/U-Care will be verified prior to every ride.
- 2) **The VDP is a last resort.** All callers will be asked if they have access to a vehicle and if they can drive or someone else can drive them. Public transit should be used for in-town rides in Winona, Caledonia, Kasson and Owatonna.
- 3) To reduce unloaded miles and mileage reimbursement expenses, the VDP will only book a ride if a driver can be found from within the participant's community (unless approved by the Transportation Director in applicable situations).
- 4) The VDP will coordinate a ride for non-medical purposes only if a driver can be found in the same community and if the participant can contribute towards the driver's reimbursement cost (\$0.50/mile).
- 5) Participants receiving services on a donation basis are encouraged to contribute closer-to-cost for the rides they receive, either by their own means or with help from family members or caregivers.

Where are your manners?

Retired & Senior Volunteer Program volunteers are teaching manners to children at Rushford-Peterson Elementary. The monthly manners classes are part of the STARS program, which stands for Self-respect, Teamwork, Attitude, Respect and Safety. The volunteers have covered table manners, self-responsibility and teamwork so far this school year. Teachers are very receptive to the volunteers and report positive student behavior since the program began. RSVP hopes to duplicate this effort in other elementary schools in its five-counties.

News from Senior Nutrition

- Local Girl Scouts are hoping to deliver at least 1,500 boxes of cookies to Meals on Wheels recipients later this spring. Customers are being encouraged to buy an extra box or two for the homebound seniors receiving Meals on Wheels.
- On March 1, the Canton Senior Dining site moved to T and J's Cafe. This site is now a voucher meal site, coordinated with volunteer assistance.
- On January 25, Rose Creek became a new Meals on Wheels community. The need for this new service was identified, and local volunteers stepped forward to handle the deliveries. The local Woody's Restaurant is preparing the meals.

Head Start happenings

* Recruitment for the 2010–2011 program year is in full swing. Events have been scheduled at various sites during the Week of the Young Child—April 11–17. Call 1-866-808-0260 to learn if there is an opening in a center near you!

* The Week of the Young Child is an opportunity to focus on the needs of young children and their families. This year's theme is *Early Years are Learning Years*. All levels of government, communities, parents, and the private sector must invest in the well-being of children and families to enjoy long-term savings, with a more vibrant nation of healthy, achieving children and stable families. Semcac thanks all early childhood educators, especially our 24 Head Start teachers and their support staff for their on-going commitment. Early childhood teachers educate and care for young children on a daily basis, helping them build a learning foundation that will support them through their lives.

* On March 1, nine Head Start parents attended the annual "Voices for Children" event, a statewide children's advocacy effort at the State Capitol. The parents and two staff joined hundreds of others from around the state to give their voice on behalf of children. The theme was *Plant the Seeds: Help Children Bloom*, and parents presented legislators with paper flowers made by their children.

* Last year the Ostrander Lions Club gave their community's Head Start center funding to purchase a laptop. It was so well received by the teacher there that Head Start is seeking contributions to



A parent obtained a \$200 sponsorship from Franciscan Skemp so that Hokah Head Start families could experience the La Crosse Children's Museum and a pizza party on March 9. Teacher JoAnn Demorest said, "It was a great night and a wonderful time for our families!"



provide laptops for teachers in all 20 classrooms. To date, we thank the Arlin Falck Foundation, Dare L. White & William F. White Foundation, Federated Insurance Foundation, and the Citizens State Bank of Hayfield that have contributed for new computers to be used in their local classrooms and for home visits with families. For more information on how you can help with this effort, please contact Lisa Hermanson at 507-864-8236.

Summer Transportation

Semcac Public Transit can provide transportation for your child during the summer months to recreation programs, swimming lessons, band/music lessons, summer school and more! In Dodge County, call 1-800-528-3874. In Fillmore, Houston or Winona counties call 1-800-944-3874. This service operates on a first come, first served, basis. Sign up your child soon!

Foundation's gift keeps families warm

The **Pohlad Family Foundation** has granted significant support to Minnesota providers of the Reach Out for Warmth Fund. Semcac's Energy Assistance Program provides Reach Out for Warmth for households that have a heating emergency but have household income slightly higher than the guidelines of the traditional Energy Assistance Program.

The Pohlad Family Foundation granted \$42,400 to Semcac's Reach Out for Warmth Fund through two grants this winter. The MN Dept. of Commerce matches donations to this fund on a 2-to-1 basis, so this gift will bring in more dollars to help many more households catch up on utility bills, including oil, LP, natural gas or electric.

Thank you to the Pohlad Family Foundation for this tremendous gift that to date has helped 368 people (102 households) in Semcac's seven counties stay warm this winter and extend their limited budgets to meet other basic needs.

High demand for energy assistance

Semcac has been notified that the MN Department of Commerce has received additional funding for this year's Energy Assistance Program. To date, Semcac's program has received 7,672 applications—10 percent more than the same time last year. Of those, 6,578 households have received assistance with energy bills and 302 applications are pending. One recipient recently wrote:

"Thank you so much for your help in receiving a water heater and a furnace. Two jobs and raising two girls on my own is tough. So thanks for your help also with our heat bill. I have never been so happy in my life as to receive a few nice things with help from those who care."

Applications are taken through May. Call 1-800-944-3281 or visit www.semcac.org.

News from the Semcac Clinic

* The Family Planning Clinic is now on Facebook! Search "Semcac" and join the fan page for updates and information.



* In February, Health Services Director Chrissy Feine began the new role of providing education outside the clinic. She looks forward to more opportunities to speak at local high schools, colleges or other venues.



Director Chrissy Feine

* ARRA funding for MN Vaccines for Children is allowing the clinic to ex-

pand eligibility for the HPV vaccine. Now adults ages 19-26 can receive this free vaccine through the program!

* On March 2 and 3, Winona State University students from Dr. Sternberg's class handed out over 600 care packages to students on campus. The care packages were aimed at positively informing young people about the benefits of condom use in preventing pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. The importance, content and tone of this information was brought to light through student-conducted focus groups on campus. Focus group members were very upfront and honest about information they would take time to read and what strategies they thought would be useful. The packets' message focused on condom use due to its "simplicity"—as teen pregnancy rates begin to creep back up after 14 years of steady decline and Minnesota Chlamydia statistics have more than doubled since 1996, the need for a simple solution combined with education is the start to reversing these numbers.

Goodbye (from page 1)

accomplishment during this period was the purchase of a city-owned community center that was rehabilitated, allowing Semcac to expand its food shelf and reestablish its Rushford senior dining site.

Getting past the flood event, we were able to focus on improving several of our outreach/contact centers located across our service area. These centers provide a key contact point for people needing a variety of Semcac services including food support. The contact center in Caledonia, which is owned by Semcac, was deteriorating badly and had a complete makeover inside and out in 2009. This facility is now ready to serve our consumers for many years to come. Our contact centers located in Fillmore, Winona and Dodge counties were also moved to better, more spacious locations last year.

With the poor economy and recession the Federal government created a number of initiatives through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act to create green jobs. Semcac was the recipient of funding to help in this effort through its Weatherization program and other initiatives formulated by the Board of Directors. These initiatives are now in progress and have had a very positive impact on low income households seeking help to lower energy costs through weatherization activities.

So in ending, I will miss you and remember these days as a rich and exciting time of my life. It is with great appreciation, I say goodbye to you, my friends and colleagues who have weathered with me the storms of life and found great insights and hope in the work we do each day.

Take Care,

Terry



Stand up, be counted!

In March every Minnesota household will have received a 2010 Census form that should take about 10 minutes to complete. The information provided determines how over \$400 billion in federal funds are distributed to the states each year and helps ensure that Minnesota has its fair share of representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. Minnesota is dangerously close to losing one of eight Congressional seats, reducing our state's voice in the nation's affairs. Estimates show that the difference between losing and keeping a seat could be as small as 2,000 people.

Individual census responses are not shared with anyone, including government agencies or private organizations. It is against the law for the Census Bureau to give personally identifiable information about an individual to any other individual or agency until 72 years after it is collected for the decennial census. After 72 years, the individual census records are sent to the National Archives where they are made public primarily for genealogical research.

Forms will be mailed in English, but households may call a toll free number on the back of the English form to receive the form in another language. Those households that do not respond to the mailed form will receive a visit from a census worker later this spring.

Dollars & Sense class schedule

The public is welcome to attend Semcac's free financial literacy classes from 5:00–8:00 p.m. on the dates shown to the right. A meal is provided, and some participants may qualify for childcare reimbursement. The Dollars and Sense classes have become so popular that waiting lists have had to be established for some classes—so call early to reserve your seat!

Date and Location	Contact
April 8 in Owatonna	Michele at 507.451.7134
April 15 in Albert Lea	Vicky at 507.373.1329
May 13 in Austin	Jenni at 507.433.5889
June 10 in Albert Lea	Vicky at 507.373.1329
June 24 in Owatonna	Michele at 507.451.7134
July 15 in Austin	Jenni at 507.433.5889
August 12 in Albert Lea	Vicky at 507.373.1329
August 19 in Owatonna	Michele at 507.451.7134

Semcac Board of Directors 2010 Schedule

January 11	July 12
February 8	August 9
March 8	September 13
April 12	October 11
May 10	November 8
June 14	December 13

Meetings are open to the public and begin at 6:30 p.m. in the St. Charles Community Center (830 Whitewater Avenue)

Getting to know the Semcac Board...

Greg Olson, Winona County

Board Service: Since April 2009

Sector: Public Official—Winona Co. Commissioner

Residence: Winona

Family: Greg is a father of two children—son Taylor who is 13 and daughter Bailey who is 8.

Occupation: Building Inspector for City of Winona, Building Official for City of Stockton, and CFO of Homestead Inspections, Inc.

Community Involvement: Greg is a member of the Winona Housing Association, Winona Central City Neighborhood Association, Winona County Workforce Council, WSU Adopt-a-Block Advisory Taskforce and more.

Personal Interests: Most of Greg's leisure time is spent on the Mississippi River enjoying water sports, campfires and relaxing with family and friends.



Christopher Shoff, Freeborn County

Board Service: Since January 2009

Sector: Public—Freeborn Co. Commissioner

Residence: Albert Lea

Family: Christopher is married to Angela.

Occupation: Chiropractor

Community Involvement: Christopher is a member of the Logan College of Chiropractic Alumni Association Board of Directors, Albert Lea Noon Lions Club and First Lutheran Church of Albert Lea.

Personal Interests: Christopher enjoys golf, playing the piano and guitar, oil painting and cooking.



Semcac Board of Directors

Dodge County

Klaus Alberts, Jr.
Beverly Ofstie
Lyle Tjosacs

Fillmore County

Chuck Amunrud
Randy Dahl
Ruth Fallon
Merle Peterson

Houston County

Bob Augedahl
John Bashaw
Larry Connery
Patty Miller
DeLorace Reed

Freeborn County

Linda Tuttle
Christopher Shoff

Mower County

Janice Ball
Tim Gabrielson
Norm Flugum

Steele County

Richard Schaefer
Mark Schultz
Janice Schultz
Theresa Zilm

Winona County

Joe Hoffman
Mena Kaehler
Greg Olson
Deb Spitzer
Robert Youngerman

Head Start Policy

Council Liaison

Trisha Christopherson

There are currently Board member vacancies in Semcac's service area counties. For more information, please call Executive Director Terry Erickson at (507) 864-7741.

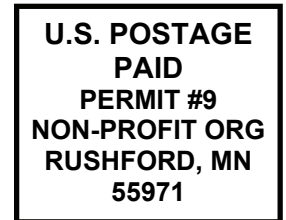
The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.





204 S. Elm St
P.O. Box 549
Rushford, MN 55971-0549



Return Service Requested

ADDRESS UPDATE

- Please change my address as noted on the enclosed mailing label.
- Please remove my name from your list.

Include the mailing label with your instructions. You may also request to have your newsletter e-mailed in the future or send your preferences to jennifer.hengel@semcac.org. Thank you for helping keep our mailing costs down.

www.semcac.org

(and sign up for e-mail news)

***Administrative Office**—(507) 864-7741

Contact Centers

- *Dodge County (507) 634-4350
- *Fillmore County (507) 765-2761
- Freeborn County (507) 373-1329
- *Houston County (507) 725-3677
- Mower County (507) 433-5889
- Steele County (507) 451-7134
- Winona County (507) 452-8396

Family Planning Clinic—(507) 452-4307

*Food Co-op Site



A United Way funded agency in Dodge, Freeborn, Mower and Steele counties.

Respond to Census 2010!

Minnesota cannot afford to miss anyone. There is a lot at stake—a Congressional seat (representation for MN) and funding for your local cities, schools and many social services including some programs Semcac provides are funded based on population and information gathered by the Census. Please do your part and spend 10 minutes completing your Census form. See page 8 for more details.



Please send information that you would like included in ***The Semcac Review*** to jennifer.hengel@semcac.org.