

# Reflecting On My, On Our, Team



*A photo from happier times last summer.*

We are only as strong as our people, especially in times of crisis. And, South Milwaukee, you can rest assured we are as strong as ever during this pandemic.

And that's because of a team that is demonstrating the focus, resiliency, flexibility and "all hands on deck," team-first mentality needed now, more than ever. I knew this was the case for years. I have seen it in action every day the past two weeks.

Be confident in that as we continue to navigate these uncharted waters and continue to make collaborative and informed decisions in the best interest of the city.

## **Public Health**

I start with our Health Department because this is where we have to start in an emergency like this. We rely on their experience in making sometimes terribly difficult decisions like closing city buildings, and we full-throatedly stand behind their orders like closing bars and restaurants. This is a public health crisis, and our actions are and will always be guided by these too-often overlooked professionals.

It has been especially inspiring and reassuring to see the leadership of Health Administrator Jackie Ove and the dedicated work of her team the South Milwaukee and St. Francis Health

Departments. They are showing why our investments in public health are so critical, and it's been easy to see in the past week that Jackie has earned her positions as a trusted and respected voice in the county, region and state. There is a lot more work to do with this group, and we have the right team and leader in place.

### **First Responders**

They continue to step up in really difficult situations, and I am so, so grateful. They will need to continue to do that, and I have complete confidence they will. These people are heroes, and there will be more lives to save. They are more than up for the challenge. And that starts at the top, with two incredible leaders. We are blessed to have Police Chief William Jessup and South Milwaukee Fire Chief Joe Knitter, and their combined nearly 70 years of experience, guiding those departments. Chief Jessup is the head of MCLEA, the organization of chiefs and other law enforcement leaders across the county, and is speaking on behalf of that organization at all major county emergency operations meetings. Chief Knitter has just as strong a voice with the fire department chiefs organization, and is also playing a leadership role in the countywide emergency response.

### **Clerk and Treasurer's Offices**

We are trying our best to run an election in the middle of this, and are adapting to a huge shift in how people vote, on the fly. Absentee ballot requests have been pouring in by the thousands, and it's been "all hands on deck" to process those and get them in the mail. We are also preparing for in-person absentee voting starting on Monday, reworking our process to ensure we are keeping social distancing, and making similar plans for Election Day on April 7. (Again, we are **strongly advising** people to order a ballot online. Details [here](#).) This work is led by City Clerk Karen Kastenson, and I can't thank her enough for her leadership, dedication and willingness to adapt age-old voting processes to our current reality. Her team is making it happen and will in the next two weeks.

Our payroll clerk, Katie Crosby, also doubles as our communications coordinator, and she, along with Assistant City Administrator Patrick Brever, have done some amazing work in this area the past couple of weeks. From the day it became clear this might be where we were headed, we decided to focus on communications, knowing the sharing of timely, clear, relevant and, most importantly, accurate information would be vital. I'm proud of what we — they — have delivered, and we will continue to.

Bills still must be paid, and payments collected, and that is the work of our treasurer's team, led by Treasurer Karen Skowronski. Her steady hand and the hard work of her team never wavers, and their teamwork in supporting the Clerk's Office work is appreciated.

### **Street Department**

Garbage is still being picked up, and our Self-Deposit Station remains open. Signs are being made (especially critical these days), and vehicles are being maintained. While they are taking measures to protect themselves and you, the fact that we continue to deliver these services — and the many others performed by our Street Department — so seamlessly is a testimony to the leadership of Superintendent Dan Ratajski and the hard work of his team. Now hopefully we can hold off on any more salt or plow operations this season ...

### **Water and Sewer Utilities**

Our investments in fresh water pay off now, as what happens when you turn on your faucet and flush your toilet is no different now than it was two weeks ago. That won't change. Thanks, Doug Fischer and Ben Huffman, and your teams, for your continued focus on these critical services, especially in difficult times.

### **Grobschmidt Senior Center**

We acted quickly to shut down the senior center, out of an abundance of caution. But that doesn't mean the work of Director Sandy Quinlan has stopped. She now leads our senior meal program dropoff site at the center and pitches in in other ways. If you are a senior who could use a free lunch each weekday — or know of one who does — check out information on the [front page of our website](#). Thanks to Sandy and her group of volunteers for leading this important part of our safety net.

### **South Milwaukee Public Library**

The library shut down on Tuesday, and after trying curbside pickup briefly, have instead turned to some really cool virtual efforts like a book club and storytime. (Details on their [Facebook page](#).) And they are using this downtime to catalog materials to support the new RFID checkout system being installed. We are also redeploying resources to help in the clerk's office on elections.

Sorry for the long post, but every city service is impacted by COVID-19 — and every city department is stepping up. There are plenty more to thank here — work is still happening in engineering, inspections, assessment, etc. — and I thank them every chance I get.

But I want to close with a word about our city administrator, Tami Mayzik. Mayors come and go, and I'll do the same at some point. I suppose Tami will retire at some point, hopefully many years from now. Until she does, she will continue providing the same strong, steady, thoughtful, compassionate, and unbreakable leadership she has for well over a decade. She often works behind the scenes, and wants it that way. But we (I) would never be able to navigate through

something like this without her. She is my right and left hand, and I am so blessed to have her by my side every day, especially in these times of crisis. Tami loves this city and wants what is best for it at all times, and that shows through every day.

That last sentence applies to me too. But I could not, would not, do this without my team, in crisis and not.