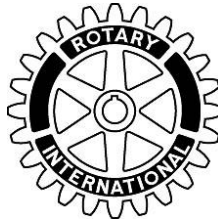


2024 Candidate Forum- County Commissioner

10/7/2024

Sponsored by:



OWATONNA
People's Press

Schedule of Events

11:30 – 11:50 Lunch

11:50 – Tom Partridge, Noon Rotary President

11:55 – (Introductions) -Brad Meier, President/CEO Owatonna Chamber of Commerce and Tourism

12:00 PM – 1:30 PM Forum Moderator: Julie Rethemeier, Federated Insurance-Retired

Format of Forum

Questions

- No questions provided to the candidates in advance
- Questions from the audience will be reviewed and passed on to the moderator if appropriate and if time allows
- Candidates will alternate responses to each questions and will be allowed one minute for each question-should the candidates go past their allotted time, the moderator will cut them off
- Opening statement (two minutes)
- Answer question (one minute, 30 seconds): yellow card (45 sec.), red card (stop)
- Closing statement (two minutes)

***Candidate bios were submitted by the candidates and were not modified or edited by the hosting organizations.**

***Bios of candidates are on back side of agenda**

STEELE COUNTY COMMISSIONER FORUM



Jim Abbe: (Incumbent District 4)

- I was raised on a small farm in Aurora Township and later moved to Owatonna. I've been married to my wife Lori for 39 years. We have two adult daughters and recently welcomed our first granddaughter.
- For 30 years, I've worked as a Property Director at Life Style, Inc. in Owatonna where I oversee and manage multiple properties, budgets and personnel.
- I'm proud to say I've served eight years as your Steele County Commissioner representing District #4 where I have been the board chair twice.
- Additionally, I am involved in various community organizations and serve on/work with several different boards, committees, and Joint Powers Boards.
- This is a position I do not take lightly and understand all of us elected officials have a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers who have put their trust in us.



Rick Gnemi: (Incumbent District 3)

- Rick was born in 1951 and raised in Hobart, Indiana. He came to Owatonna in 1970 after attending university at Indiana University for a year. Rick transferred to Mankato University majoring in business administration and economics. He began remodeling older single-family homes in Owatonna in 1971 while putting himself through college. (As a side note, Rick has remodeled over sixty older homes in Owatonna and is currently in the process of renovating a home he had originally purchased 50 years ago.)
- Upon finishing his course of study at Mankato University, the nation was in a recessionary cycle and jobs were scarce in the field of business. He worked at a local appliance dealership remodeling the store for the owners for a year. During this time, Rick was employed at Owatonna Savings and Loan in the mortgage department. It was here he became interested in the real estate appraisal field and began taking appraisal courses in Rochester, Minnesota. Rick continued to remodel several older homes in Owatonna. Rick and his wife, Debbie, have enjoyed antique collecting for several years. He has been a long-time member of the Owatonna Lions Club and the Owatonna Coin and Collectors Club.
- In 1977, Rick began his own independent real estate appraisal business, Gnemi Appraisal Service, and developed business relationships with several banks and mortgage lenders in Owatonna and Steele County. Eventually he added Waseca, Dodge, Rice, Le Sueur, Mower, and Freeborn counties to his service roster. Rick is a licensed Certified General Real Estate Appraisal license for all property types: residential, multi-residential, rural, commercial, and industrial (both buildings and land) and continues to appraise properties in SE Minnesota, retaining his licensure by continuing education through state approved real estate appraisal courses. During the past

45 years, Rick has also taught courses in various aspects of real estate appraising and mortgage lending principles.

- Rick made the decision in 2016 to run for the county commissioner position in District 3, Steele County. He has served two terms focusing on a conservative financial county budget, placing great emphasis on transparent and effective communication with the county department heads, staff, the county administrator, and increased interaction with the citizens. Protecting, safeguarding, and practicing sound financial policies with the taxpayer's hard-earned dollars is a priority for Rick. A positive achievement while Rick has served with the board of commissioners has been to maintain a consistent county budget of approximately 4% which is well below the double digit spending the county experienced with previous boards.



Josh Prokopec: (Candidate District 3)

- Hello! I'm Josh Prokopec, a lifelong resident of Owatonna. I've been happily married to my wife, Annie, for 24 years, and together we have two adult daughters and two small dogs.
- Currently, I serve as the Manager of Gas/Water Operations, Engineering, and Facilities at Owatonna Public Utilities. My professional background includes civil engineering, project management, and facilities management, giving me extensive knowledge of various aspects of the public sector.
- My career began with two years at Steele County working at the Four Seasons Centre, followed by seventeen years as an Engineering Technician for the City of Owatonna, and now I've spent the past six years at OPU.
- Additionally, I've been involved with the Steele County Free Fair for 31 years—26 of those as an employee and the last five as a member of the Board of Directors.

- Volunteering is a significant part of my life, whether it's coaching my daughters' youth sports teams or assisting with Knights of Columbus events whenever possible. Currently,
- I hold the position of SE Minnesota Trustee for the American Water Works Association Board and have been elected Vice President of the Prairieland Utility Coordinating Committee for SE Minnesota, where I focus on promoting education in damage prevention. My background and dedication to public service reflect a deep commitment that I plan to uphold for many years to come.



Greg Krueger: (Incumbent District 5)

- Because of the encouragement of so many of you, I have decided to run for re-election to the Steele County Board of Commissioners for District Five. Although I can only ask for the votes of District Five residents, I am asking for the support of ALL Steele County residents because I represent all the residents of the county.
- Together, with your support, we have made some tremendous accomplishments all while keeping the county's levy increases to amounts that are easy to understand and not too hard on your wallets. I wish we could control property valuation and land prices, but that is out of our control. Our assessors do what they can, but are managed by state set standards to stay in compliance.
- Steele County has a tremendous work force that serves you, the public, every single day. They work hard, do great work and are the envy of our surrounding counties. It is thanks to them that Steele County is the shining star in GREATER MINNESOTA. Please thank them the next time you see them.
- I have found out in the course of eight years as your Commissioner that some decisions we make don't make everyone happy. It is our job, and we take it seriously, to weigh ALL the facts and make the best decisions for the entire county. Everyone is entitled to a voice in Steele County government, and all voices are listened to. However, at the end of the day, we have to

make decisions that affect all the citizens of Steele County, By analyzing those facts, looking at possible alternatives and relying on expert advice, we can come to the best possible outcome.

- **I am asking for your support and confidence to serve you again as your Steele County Commissioner.**
- **There are still some things to accomplish to set Steele County on a prosperous and efficient course for the next generation. Together we can make that happen. THANK YOU for the privilege of serving you and I look forward to even more accomplishments in the next four years.**



Scott Prestegard: (Candidate District 5)

- Bio was unavailable at the time of printing

