

# One in a *Ver* Million

## Meet Ruth Bremer

**By David Lias**  
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Ruth Bremer has been a constant presence in the Clay County Auditor's office, located on the second floor of the Clay County Courthouse, for over two decades.

Soon, that will change. Ruth is retiring with plans to direct her energies towards projects at home and to also spend more time with family. Her last day on the job as county auditor is June 28.

"In December of 1989, I became deputy auditor," Ruth said, "so it has been 23 and one-half years. I was deputy for eight years under Bonnie Albers."

When Albers retired as auditor in 1998, "the board (of county commissioners) appointed me until the next election, and then I ran," Ruth said. "Nobody ran against me."

For nearly 20 years before being employed in the auditor's office, Ruth worked as a bookkeeper at a private business in Vermillion.

"When my kids got out of high school, I decided that I needed a job that would give me better benefits," she said. "I had applied, previously, for a job in the (county) treasurer's office, but it was filled by someone else."

Shortly after Albers

became auditor, she asked Ruth if she would like fill a vacant job in that office. "She knew me, and she knew I was a hard worker, and so she asked, and I said, 'You betcha. I'll be right there.'"

In her previous job, Ruth had worked at bookkeeping, payroll and other clerical duties. It was experience that to this day comes in handy.

During her first eight years as assistant auditor, she learned the ropes of the job, working side by side with Albers, who was also becoming acquainted firsthand with the myriad of duties a county auditor must fulfill.

"Bonnie was learning the same time I was learning," Ruth said, laughing, "and we learned together. She taught me everything she did with payroll and bills, and all of the other things she had to do."

During Albers' second year on the job, she needed heart surgery, and her short absence from the office gave Ruth her first experience in dealing with the county commission during its meetings.

"I got a little taste of what the commission was like during that time when taking minutes during the meetings and sort of being semi-in charge of the office while she was gone," she said. "It

helped me to decide that, when Bonnie would decide to retire, that I would try for it (the auditor's job). When that time came, I was the only one interested in the job, and Bonnie recommended that the board hire me, and they did."

County auditors in South Dakota have to wear many hats. They are the keeper of county records and act as a bookkeeper for county business. Records may include documents, books, or minutes from county commission meetings. Auditors are responsible for scheduling county commission meetings, preparing the agenda, following up on commission decisions through letters and memoranda, and preparing the county budget.

Ruth's duties through the years, along with other auditors across the state, include auditing bills or other claims against the county and preparing warrants in payment of these bills. This responsibility is not a light one, for auditors must be certain that all payments are accurate, and that all services for payment have actually been provided to the county office named.

A main aspect of auditors' functions is to maintain each county office budget, and to insure that each office expenditure is provided for in the county budget. South Dakota law requires that prior to spending any county money on a given project, the county must have budgeted for it, and must have the necessary funds to pay for that project. This means that no office can spend money, without budget



authority and sufficient dollars to pay for the project.

The primary source of county revenue is through property taxes. Auditors' duties include figuring real estate and mobile home taxes. Auditors don't appraise property value, but rather figure the property appraisal into a tax levy, which is forwarded to the county treasurer for collection.

Election years are also a busy time for county auditors. Prior to any election, the county auditor is responsible for notifying the public of upcoming special or general elections. Auditors are also responsible for the ordering and printing of ballots, setting up voting machines, and hiring election workers. They also supervise the election and make sure election workers have attended an

election workshop. And, any citizen who needs to register to vote may get that task completed by visiting the county auditor's office.

"Lots of people think this office is just about elections," Ruth said. "There's so much more to this job than that."

"The county auditor is the business manager of the county, the courthouse caretaker, the human resources person ... we have to take care of so many aspects, from paying the bills and the payroll, to distributing the revenue that comes in to cities and townships and schools and road districts," she said. "You have to take care of their money and make sure they get their share of the tax dollars, and then in the fall you start all over with budgets and you get all of the requests from the cities and towns and

you set their levies ... there's just a whole gamut of things that an auditor has to do."

Working with the various levies each year, to Ruth, is one of the more enjoyable parts of her job.

"Budgets and levies are the most fun, and elections are a lot of fun," she said. "Election night is always fun, when people come up here to watch the ballots being counted. When you do all of the work and everything is clicking, that's probably one of the most fun times."

### Thank You

The family of Alice "Joyce" Ashmore would like to thank everyone for their acts of kindness at the time of our loss. All the prayers, hugs, cards, flowers, food and memorials were greatly appreciated by all of us. A special thank you for those who joined us for her "Celebration" of Life. We will truly miss her smiles and warmth.

-Lois & Jerry Nygaard, Keith & Jeanine Ashmore, Mona & Richard Fennel, Barbara & Chris Mitchell, Roger & Cathy Ashmore & Families

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