

Bremer will soon end 23-year career as Clay County auditor

By David Lias
david.lias@plaintalk.net

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 more than 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 is 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



Ruth Bremer will have her last day as Clay County auditor on June 28, capping a career of 23 years.

(Vermillion Plain Talk file photo)

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.”

CLAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S PRESS BRIEFING

06/02/13 13:43 – A deputy responded to a report of a shed on fire near Wakonda. Fire units responded and put the fire out.

06/02/13 18:59 – A deputy investigated a two-car non-injury accident north of Vermillion.

06/03/13 06:16 – A deputy investigated a report of vandalism in the form of spray painted graffiti on a bridge north of Vermillion.

06/03/13 11:08 – A deputy assisted a rural business with recovering a key from a former employee.

06/03/13 12:48 – A deputy mediated a domestic dispute over personal property in Wakonda.

06/03/13 21:27 – A deputy investigated a report of large chunks of mud left on the road from farm equipment causing a traffic hazard. The Highway Department also responded with equipment to clear the road.

06/03/13 23:53 – A deputy transported a patient from the Sanford Emergency room to the Human Services Center in Yankton for a mental health committal.

06/04/13 00:51 – A deputy investigated a domestic assault at a rural residence. The suspect had fled prior to the report. Charges are pending.

06/04/13 06:04 – A deputy investigated a rollover accident south of Vermillion. The driver had left the scene without making a report. The driver was cited for failure to report the accident.

06/04/13 11:10 – A deputy responded to a complaint from a driver about a vehicle that pulled in front of him. The complainant then retaliated by blocking the other vehicle with his own vehicle. Both drivers were located and the matter was resolved.

06/04/13 11:29 – A report was received of a dispute between family members over who had rights to farm a 1/4 section of land. It was reported a crop of wheat was destroyed. The matter is under investigation to determine if the matter is criminal or is a civil dispute.

06/04/13 12:27 – A deputy investigated a report of damage to a bridge rail north of Vermillion. The person who was responsible was located and it was determined that the damage was accidental.

06/04/13 12:40 – A patient was transported from Irene to Yankton for a psychological evaluation and then to the Human Services Center for an involuntary mental illness hold.

06/04/13 15:25 – A patient was transported from the Sanford Emergency Room to

the Human Services Center in Yankton for an involuntary mental illness hold.

06/04/13 16:38 – A deputy served a protection order to an inmate in the Jail.

06/04/13 18:42 – An inmate was transported to the Yankton County Jail to meet a transport vehicle for extradition to Lawrence County after being arrested in Vermillion on a Lawrence County warrant.

06/04/13 19:27 – A caller reported construction cones apparently deliberately moved so traffic would be diverted into an oncoming lane. The problem was corrected. No suspects were found in the area.

06/04/13 22:57 – A report was received of cows on the road north of Vermillion. A deputy responded and met with a landowner in the area who had also see the cows out but none were located.

06/05/13 08:24 – Deputies responded to a medical emergency in Burbank and attended to a patient until an ambulance arrived.

06/05/13 15:08 – A deputy responded to a report of trash on the road just west of Vermillion. The deputy removed the trash.

06/05/13 19:09 – A deputy assisted a person with removing a vehicle stuck in the ditch.

There was no damage to report.

06/06/13 08:07 – A deputy took a report of a stray horse east of Vermillion. Attempts were made to notify the horse’s owner of the problem. The owner was not home.

06/06/13 12:29 – A deputy responded to a report of a suspicious person apparently hiding in the ditch along a rural highway. The person was not located.

06/06/13 17:22 – A deputy investigated a non-injury accident involving a city-owned vehicle in Vermillion.

06/06/13 19:11 – A deputy investigated a report of an assault involving two children

in their parents’ home. The reported incidents had happened months ago. The information was shared with the children’s parents.

06/07/13 13:10 – A deputy transported a patient from the Sanford Emergency Room to the Human Services Center in Yankton for an involuntary mental illness committal.

06/08/13 04:20 – A deputy mediated a domestic dispute in Wakonda.

06/08/13 08:41 – Deputies traveled to Mitchell to transport a detox patient back to Clay County for a court appearance.

Total Records: 28

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