



# SENATE DISTRICT 66

## DFL NEWSLETTER *November 2023*



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Tuesday, November 7, is the last day to vote. Polls open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 8:00 p.m. Confirm your polling place [here](#).

Spread the word about the importance of voting in this election, which includes:

- City officers
- School board members
- A St. Paul ballot question regarding increased sales tax

### City officers

These elected officials have a major impact on your community and daily life. They affect how much you pay in property taxes, where housing and schools are built, and where your city sets its priorities.

Typical responsibilities of mayors and council members are to:

- Approve the city budget
- Make city policies
- Communicate policies and programs to residents and respond to residents
- Create regulations for city land use, business activity, and public health and safety
- Work with committees regarding city policies and activities
- Review city goals and the city manager's accomplishments

### School Boards

Each school board member fills an important role. A district's issues can be complex and varied, and in recent years, the role has become increasingly politicized.

The major role of school boards is to represent concerns and communicate with those involved. School boards are not in charge of districts' day-to-day operations; that job falls to superintendents. School boards set the policies and goals for districts, while the superintendents implement those policies and work toward the goals.

Most school boards also have these responsibilities:

- Set a wide range of policies
- Establish the vision and goals for the school district and assess outcomes
- Hire and evaluate the superintendent
- Review, adopt, and monitor the annual budget
- Approve curriculum, following the state content standards
- Respond to stakeholders—parents, students, school administrators, teachers, and other residents

*Thanks for the League of Women Voters for information used in this article.*

## We can maximize Democratic turnout and elect our candidates

by Greg Hansen, CD4 Chair



Greetings, SD66!

I became the chair of the 4th Congressional District DFL on July 5th, following the resignation of Jen Guertin. Please join me in thanking Jen for her years of service to the CD4 DFL. Hers are big shoes to fill, but I'm not a stranger to jumping into the deep end of the pool.

In 2004, I was elected chair of the CD6 DFL. One of the first things I was asked to do was sit on Patty Wetterling's couch and ask her to run for Congress. Although Patty came up a little short, two years later we found a way to help nine candidates in CD6 win seats in the Minnesota Legislature. When I got remarried in 2014, one of the conditions was that I move to Lakeville. It took me a while to find my way around my new neighborhood, but it only took a few days to find the local DFL unit. Their chair position had recently become vacant, and I was recruited and elected before I could even attend my first meeting. Two years later, we sent Matt Little to the Minnesota Senate.

During that time, a local activist in Eagan asked if she could buy me a beer and pick my brain. After an hour or so, I was all in! Little did I know, I was one of nine leaders in CD2

she met with that day. After having our hearts broken in 2016, thousands of us celebrated as we sent our dear friend, Angie Craig, to Congress in 2018.

My wife and I found our forever home in 2000, five minutes from her office in St. Paul. She graduated from Hamline Law School, and we were back in her old neighborhood. It didn't take long to dive back into the thick of it again, as CD4 elected me their vice chair four days after we closed.

CD4 and CD5 are collectively the motor that drives the DFL's voter turnout machine. The 4th is reliably blue because of the hard work of so many for so long. While there are still opportunities to flip Minnesota House seats in CD4, it is imperative that we stay focused on our responsibility to the statewide contests that are quickly approaching in 2024.

Voter turnout in the Congressional race dropped a staggering 10 percentage points from 2018 to 2022. While Rep. McCollum won her primary and general election handily, statewide margins were much closer than we had hoped. Thankfully, through a lot of hard work, we reelected our statewide office holders and Rep. Hollins, and SD66 sent two more rock stars to the legislature in Sen. Oumou Verbeten and Rep. Finke.

My vision for the CD4 DFL in the year ahead is fairly straightforward.

There are opportunities to flip seats in the Minnesota House in southeastern Anoka and central Washington Counties. Last year, Republican Mark Wiens defeated Pat Driscoll by 128 votes in 41A (Lake Elmo/Afton) while Republican Elliott Engen defeated Susie Strom in 36A (North Oaks/Lino Lakes) by 642 votes. These seats will likely be targeted by the DFL House Caucus in 2024 and are winnable, especially in a presidential year.

Equally as important are the reelection of President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Sen. Klobuchar. Because of CD4's deep blue demographic, we have an inherent responsibility to maximize Democratic turnout, a responsibility we welcome and embrace. With SD66's help, I know we can run up the score in CD4!

Please reach out at [GregHansenDFL@aol.com](mailto:GregHansenDFL@aol.com) or (763) 438-6142. The CD4 team and I look forward to being in the fight with you for years to come. For those who helped make the CD4 Bruce Vento Dinner reboot on October 15 an incredible success, please know how much your hard work and generosity are appreciated. Thank you!

## What is happening in the district this interim

by Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten



My family and I joined Saint Anthony Park neighbors at the annual 4th in the Park celebration. I enjoyed riding along the parade route and being surrounded by familiar faces. The event's organizers once again demonstrated their outstanding skills in putting together a fantastic celebration.



July 6, 2023, marked seven years since Philando Castile was killed by a police officer during a traffic stop on Larpenteur Avenue. Each year, our community comes together at Falcon Heights City Hall to commemorate Philando's life through food and music. This year, I had the distinct honor of presenting a proclamation on behalf of the State of Minnesota, officially designating July 6 as "Restoration Day" and July 7 as "Unity Day." These "Remembrance Days," developed by the Castile family and the City of Falcon Heights, play a vital role in preserving Philando's memory.



August 1 was a remarkable day, marking the end of cannabis prohibition in Minnesota. I co-authored the bill to legalize cannabis because it was always a racial justice issue for me. To celebrate this significant milestone, I joined hundreds of activists and community members at First Ave for an unforgettable celebration.

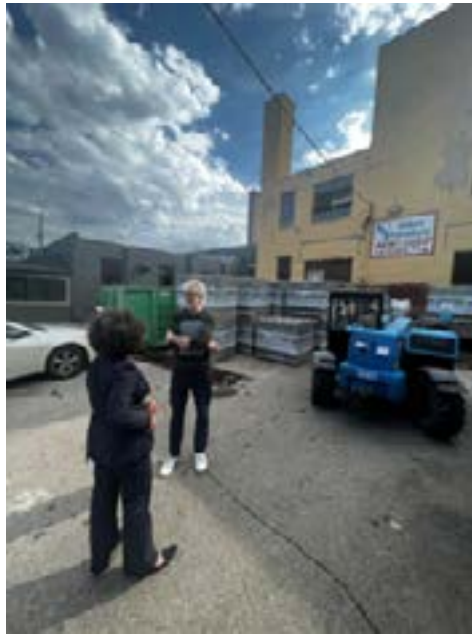
On August 6, I participated in the annual Little Africa Festival and the groundbreaking of the Little Africa Plaza on Snelling Avenue. I co-authored the bill that secured capital investment dollars for this project, which will house the state's first African museum, serve as the headquarters for African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS), and provide retail space.



In September, I joined community leaders at the North End Community Center's "Raise the Roof" event, a project years in the making. Collaborating with Rep. Hollins and Council President Brendmoen, we secured \$6 million in state bonding for this essential new center, to be located at the corner of Rice Street and Lawson Avenue West.

*(Continued on next page)*

I also toured the construction site of the new Film North facility, an initiative I was proud to co-author, securing \$2 million in state bonding for the project. Film North's work to support local filmmakers and foster the next generation of artists highlights the enormous potential of the film industry in Minnesota



September was a busy month of traveling and attending conferences. I spoke on a panel at the Connecting Families Conference in Minneapolis about my work to make all prison phone calls free for incarcerated folks and their families. I attended the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference in DC. Black leaders from across the country convened to discuss the issues facing our communities, including cannabis legalization, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), student debt cancellation, and criminal justice reform. Lastly, I joined state legislators in New York for the kickoff to the States Project Fellowship. This fellowship helps deeply invested lawmakers learn, stretch, and advance their leadership to address the political challenges of the 21st century. I am honored to be one of eighteen state legislators from across the country selected to participate in this program.



I was profiled in Teen Vogue recently in an article titled "[Clare Oumou Verbeten, Minnesota State Senator, on Representation and Protecting Black Lives.](#)" In the interview, I discussed my background and what brought me to this work, as well as the historic accomplishments of this legislative session. The rest of the country is looking to Minnesota as an example for progressive change. It was such an honor to be able to discuss my story and how my values inform the work that I do every day in the legislature.

Thank you so much for your ongoing support and engagement!



## Stand up for diverse books!

by Rep. Leigh Finke, SD66A

On Tuesday, September 12, the Carver Library Board voted unanimously to decline a request to remove the graphic novel *Gender Queer: A Memoir* from library shelves. *Gender Queer*, written and illustrated by Maia Kobabe, is a memoir that describes Kobabe's childhood in California, their journey of self-discovery, and coming out to family and friends. In July, a woman from Waconia raised concerns about the book. From July 2021 to Dec. 2022, the book was banned in 56 school districts across the nation, the most of any book. *Gender Queer* has become the most challenged book in the United States, according to the American Library Association.

The Minnesota House Queer Caucus released the following statement:

“We applaud the Carver County Library Board of Advisors on their decision to decline to remove *Gender Queer* from their shelves. The decision by the Carver Library Board is a victory for free speech and intellectual freedom. It is important to create a space where all young people feel safe and accepted for who they are and who they are becoming.

This coming-of-age book is being targeted and demonized because it provides a realistic and honest portrayal of what it is like to be genderqueer, and it can help young people who are struggling with their own gender identity. We cannot allow the anti-trans and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ threat to terrorize our state. It is imminent and we must be vigilant against the bigotry and violence that is being projected upon the most vulnerable in our community.”

## We are tackling needs and finances

by Commissioner and Chair Trista Martinson



As we near the end of the Ramsey County budget process, I am here to share an update on our progress and vision for the upcoming year. This budget cycle, the Board of Commissioners decided to limit the levy increase to the minimum needed to maintain existing services in the face of rapidly rising costs. The County Program Aid increase passed by the legislature last session covered approximately a quarter of this cost, saving money for homeowners across the county.

The last few years have shown our community's strength in the face of the challenges posed by the pandemic. Together, we've tackled immediate needs as they have arisen during these tough times. As we continue to move forward, our primary focus returns to enhancing the delivery of essential services that our neighbors rely on every day. Our goal is to ensure that these services, whether in public safety or health and human services, not only meet but exceed your expectations.

At the same time, we remain committed to advancing our strategic priorities in areas including juvenile justice reform and climate change adaptation. Ramsey County has a rich history of leading the progressive transformative change that our community needs, and we will continue to diligently pursue projects and initiatives that fall in line with our strategic priorities, with a keen focus on pressing matters like equity, economic development, and sustainability.

Over the past half-century, Minnesota's success has hinged on equitable funding for local governments, which, in turn, translates into an improved quality of life for Ramsey County residents. Every additional dollar of County Program Aid received from the state substantially eases the property tax burden on low-income households in our county. While we are grateful for the increase passed by the legislature last session, I want to emphasize that Ramsey County taxpayers continue to pay for tens of millions of dollars in unfunded state mandates, including new mandates passed just this last session.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your ongoing support and trust. We could not drive the kinds of positive change we envision without your thoughtful engagement and advocacy within your communities. Your collective strength and dedication are the driving forces behind the positive changes we envision, and I look forward to working alongside you as we continue to build a better future for Ramsey County.

P.S.: I took a sneak-peek ride of the new Gateway State Trail route in St. Paul, which replaces the old path behind the abandoned Kmart. It's a beautiful project that couldn't have happened without the combined work of people at the DNR, county, city, and port. I highly recommend you go walk or bike the new trail and enjoy this beautiful fall.



## Birds are abundant in Minnesota

by Gwen Willems

Whether you're a serious, get-out-the-binoculars-and-go-to-a-park birder or someone who just enjoys seeing and hearing birds in your neighborhood, the new edition of *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota* is good reading.

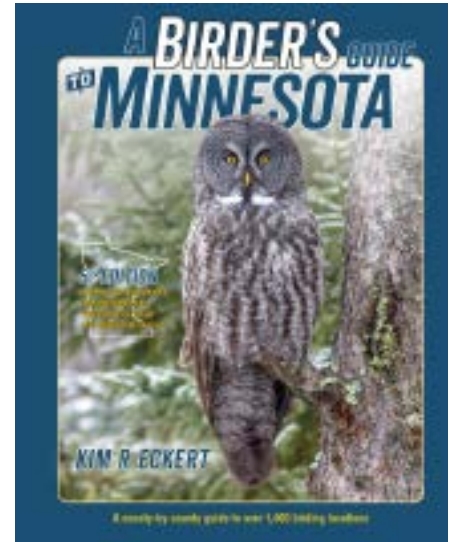
The densely packed fifth edition, released by Stone Ridge Press in December 2022, is the comprehensive Minnesota county-by-county birding guide to more than 1,400 birding locations. The first edition published by the state's premier bird guide Kim Richard Eckert in 1974 was 114 pages long, compared to the new edition's 472 pages. The book includes an exhaustive annotated list of all 451 of Minnesota's bird species with field identification tips, 170

color bird photos, checklists for Minnesota's "non-bird" wildlife, and about 100 detailed maps. QR codes allow the reader to easily link directly to additional maps for specific birding locations and the best seasonal birding sites.

Eckert was in tenth grade when a biology class in the Chicago area sparked his interest in birding. He majored in English at St. John's University and taught English during the 1970s. In 1977 he moved to Duluth and began a twenty-year stint as naturalist at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, where he taught bird identification classes and led birding tours. In 1986, after thirty years with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, he created the Minnesota Birding Weekends & Weeks program, leading bird tours throughout Minnesota and other spots in the United States and Canada. The program is now in its thirty-eighth season. Eckert still lives in Duluth where he says he muses about the Great Plains, prefers to not take anything too seriously, and finds joy in not knowing where he is going.

Minnesota has emerged as a destination of choice for birders in the last decades. According to Eckert, one does not need to go to Alaska, California, Arizona, Texas, or Florida to see several of the most sought-after species in North America. In Minnesota, we host Spruce- and Sharp-tailed grouse, Yellow Rail, Arctic-type gulls, northern owls (Snowy, Northern Hawk, Great Gray, Boreal), American Three-toed and Black-backed woodpeckers, Northern Shrike, Boreal Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, winter finches (grosbeaks, redpolls, crossbills), LeConte's Sparrow, and Connecticut and other warblers.

Eckert divides Minnesota into three major habitats—West, which includes prairie grasslands; Northeast, mostly coniferous forests; and Southeast with deciduous woodlands. In the book, he goes into much greater detail about our state's geography and habitats.



*Minnesota is not only large in size but also in its variety of habitats. Most characteristic of these would be the coniferous forest of the vast boreal zone which spills over the Canadian border and reaches its southern limit in the predominantly wooded Northeast region. Deciduous hardwood forests typical of more southern latitudes come as far north with the Mississippi River watershed to include the mixed landscapes of the Southeast Region. The Great Plains of the Dakotas continue east into the West Region, mostly open country with extensive farmlands mixed with a few remnant and significant prairie grasslands. And the Great Lakes extend a quite different marine component inland via Lake Superior—the largest freshwater lake in the world.*

(Continued on next page)

I was especially interested in the five pages devoted to densely populated Ramsey County. Eckert pointed out fifteen birding locations in the county, many of which you would expect, such as the Bruce Vento Sanctuary and Tamarack Nature Center. A pleasant surprise for me was White Bear Lake. Eckert notes that, “This lake attracts good numbers of waterfowl (with occasional scoters in fall), grebes, and roosting gulls (including Iceland). More than twenty shorebird species have been recorded in years past in White Bear (when lower water levels used to be maintained), and its marshes have both bitterns and Yellow-headed Blackbirds during summer, along with an occasional Nelson’s sparrow in migration.” Not surprisingly, about half of the Ramsey County sites are along the Mississippi River. It was also good to see Eckert include the Arden Hills Army Training Site, where I have seen remarkable birds and nests.

Check this book out of the library, use the QR codes, and see a few of the local birds that Eckert considers key. The Red-shouldered Hawk is a Ramsey County resident; waterfowl and warblers migrate through; and summering birds include the Sandhill Crane, heron/egrets, Peregrine Falcon, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Prothonotary Warbler, and Dickcissel.

*Gwen is co-chair of the Capitol Region Watershed District Community Advisory Committee.*



*Eckert’s sense of humor adds to the enjoyment of reading this book. Photo by Sparky Stensaas.*



### Thanks to volunteers at the donut booth!

by Linda Zelig

Senate District 66 fielded 48 volunteers across two of the hottest days at the Minnesota State Fair, including Labor Day. Five elected officials stepped up to bag and sell donuts--thank you Todd Anderson, Amy Brendmoen, Athena Hollins, Wayne Groff, and Clare Verbeten. Also SD66 and CD4 executive committee members: Remy Huerta-Stemper, Noelle Bakken, and Jen Guertin. Clare Verbeten signed up three of her family members (it's a tight space--they must like each other!). Donut booth lore holds that donuts do not sell on hot days, but the lines at the window were steady. Also heard that donuts sell well after a country western show at the grandstand, so Tuesday night's crowd clamoring for donuts at 11:00 p.m. kept that observation intact.

What a great 2023 donut crew! All our thanks!

The SD66 Donut Committee 2023

Priscilla Wyeth, Cynthia Anderson, Wayne Groff, Karen Schaffer, Jim Dryden, Savanna Borne, Linda Zelig



### Vento Dinner was a huge success

by Gwen Willems

The rebooted Vento Dinner was held on October 15. It has long been an outstanding chance to socialize and raise funds for the 4th Congressional District DFL. Among the speakers at the sold-out event were Congresswoman Betty McCollum, Minnesota State Auditor Julie Blaha, Rep. Sandra Feist, Sen. Founq Hawj, and Minnesota DFL Chair Ken Martin. CD4 Chair Greg Hansen served as MC.

Online and silent auctions and a jazz band were part of the Vento Dinner, which was held at the Maplewood Area Historical Society's Bruentrup Heritage Farm.

*Congresswoman Betty McCollum speaking at the Vento Dinner. Photo by Gwen Willems.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit our website at <http://sd66-dfl.org/> for updates.

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The *Senate District 66 DFL Newsletter* is published four times a year to inform and educate all interested parties in the activities and issues of SD66 DFLers including elected officials and endorsed candidates. Please contact the editor if you are interested in joining the newsletter committee or submitting an article for publication.

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