



January 22, 2009

To: Vermilion County Mayors

Subject: January Meeting Minutes
School Truancy and Juvenile Delinquency

Mayors' Council was held on January 22, 2008 at Vermilion Advantage. Council Attendees: Mayor Terry Prillaman (Rossville), Mayor Dave Ferber (Fairmount), Mayor Jeff Slavik (Westville), Mayor Eleanor White (Bismarck), Mayor David Phillips (Tilton), Mayor Clayton Woodard (Catlin), Todd Lee, Vermilion Advantage.

Guests: Bill Shannon (Rossville Police Chief), Nancy Null (Rossville Trustee), Ben White (Bismarck citizen), Barb Chatman (LAN WrapAround), Dee Ann Ryan (708 Mental Health Bd.), Barry Voorhees (Catlin citizen), Claudia Anderson (Circuit Court Judge), Mike Metzen (Regional Superintendent of Schools), Tricia Keith (County Truancy Officer), Paul Sermersheim (Peer Court)

The Quarterly meeting was called to order by Terry Prillaman at 6 PM.

Minutes of the October 2008 meeting were approved unanimously. Moved by Mayor Slavik, second- Mayor White

Judge Anderson gave a presentation about the Juvenile Court System in Vermilion Co. She outlined the process, the current case load and the options for punishment. Highlighted points of the presentation are:

- Motivation - we need to get kids to look in a different direction.
- Value of Education - your personal possessions may be stolen, but no one can take away your educational attainment.
- Stage of Adjustment - the courts first tool is to punish and correct a juvenile offender. Peer Court is an example.
- Extended an invitation to Council members to attend juvenile court
- MRAI - Minor Requiring Authoritative Intervention.
- The court system also includes disciplines for the parents, but many times the courts do not know who the custodial parents are. These parents must be identified. If kids do not go to school, the parents will be the ones paying the court fees.
- If cases are brought to the bench by the Prosecutor, she will deal with them accordingly.
- It is important the State's Attorney is willing to prosecute cases.
- The State's Attorney office has an important role in the process. They need to be involved with discussion.
- She is happy to see the community asking, "How can we help?" This is exactly what the President mentioned in his Inaugural Speech.
- The Juvenile Justice Council meets quarterly, and the State's Attorney is the Chairman.

Mayor Woodard, an IL State Police Juvenile Officer, mentioned the avg. age for a first-time drug user is 12 to 14 years.

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e-mail: contact@vermilionadvantage.com
<http://www.vermilionadvantage.com>

Vermilion Advantage, NFP
217-442-6201

28 West North Street, Suite 101
800-373-6201

Danville, Illinois 61832
Fax: 217-442-6228

Sup. Metzen gave an overview of the County truancy system and provided County Truancy data.

- Driver's License Suspension - this practice may be used, but the majority of truancy cases are students below the age of 16.
- Meetings with families - the County meets with the families of truancy violators.
- Day-time curfews - Fines may be given. Paul Sermersheim will provide a sample of Danville's ordinance.
- Dist. 118 has a 35% student mobility rate. IL student mobility rate is 15%.
- Prevention, not reaction, is where we need to focus.
- More alternative programs are needed. The new programs recently added are seeing positive results.
- Funding is an issue, but the reality is we should not expect increased funding; we must find ways as a community to meet the challenges.
- The schools need to make sure they have a policy defining unexcused absence, especially in the elementary schools.
- Vermilion County is below the state average in dollars spent per student.
- Jamaica and Schlarman require community-service work of all students before graduating.

Officer Keith gave a presentation about her role and gave examples of cases and presented ideas for municipal assistance.

- Kids are having trouble finding jobs and many are helping their parents with wage earnings. Some skip school to work and help support their family.
- Some kids are truant because they are serving as baby-sitters for younger siblings. Some of the reasons are because a parent is working and can't afford day care or because the parents are too lazy to get out of bed.
- The court system is the last resort, but sometimes it is necessary.
- Teen pregnancy is another reason for truancy – as young as 13-years old.
- Seventeen-year old 8th graders are a challenge. Alternatives are needed for these situations.
- Any child between the ages of 7 and 17 should be in school and considered truant if they are not in school for any unexcused reason. If municipal employees see a student out of school, they should immediately call the school.
- The school secretary is the best source for the local authorities to remain in contact with at the local schools.
- Each school district has a separate policy to deal with truancy. Once a student has missed 10% of the school year, their case is turned over to her.
- Danville has one of the toughest policies in the county. Any absences after an accrued six days must have a doctor's note.
- The City of Danville has done a good job providing "Stage of Adjustment" options.

Mr. Sermersheim spoke about Peer Court.

- A parent is charged \$10 when a child is sent to Peer Court.
- The parent must be present for the prep session and the court session.
- The parent must sign a contract stating the child will fulfill the contract.
- Municipal court fines an offender and sends them out the door and does not have many teeth.
- Many times cases sent to the State's Attorney are not brought back up. They are seeing a positive change in this, with the new State's Attorney.
- Peer Court has all kinds of information about jobs that communities can have kids do. He will assist any community willing to set up community-service programs for youth.
- He sees the best results when the children are able to work in the parks. Many of the urban kids have never seen a live deer and they are amazed when they have those first exposures with nature.
- Peer Court is a county-wide program.
- Peer Court auction is 2/20/09.

Mrs. Ryan mentioned the decrease in job opportunities for teen-agers is a challenge. They are unable to see a movie or pay for a bus fare. Lack of money leads some children to theft. Some of the kids are completely eliminated from job considerations due to findings in a background check.

Ms. Chatman spoke about WrapAround and provided literature.

Mayor Slavik asked how the community-service programs fit in with insurance liabilities. His experience with insurance company risk managers is they advise municipalities not to participate in these types of programs at risk of higher insurance premiums.

Mayor Woodard volunteered the former Catlin Police Station for a Peer Court building to be used however needed. He also warned attendees of a white van with IN plates that has been soliciting in the County as a carpet and upholstery cleaning business. Their true intent is to case your home for a later robbery. They typically give a 1 ½ hour demonstration and at some point they ask to use the restroom. They enter into the medicine cabinet and take all medicines. They are very professional in their dress and conduct, and are very deceiving.

Mayor Prillaman appointed Mayor Woodard to represent the Mayors' Council on the Juvenile Justice Council.

The next Mayors' Council is scheduled for April 23, 2009. The Mayors are encouraged to bring trustees. The focus of the meeting will be an acclimation and overview of the Vermilion County Mayors' Council. All local government officials are welcome. Please plan to attend.

Todd Lee

Mayors' Council minutes will be posted on Vermilion Advantage's webpage. The link for the webpage is <http://www.vermilionadvantage.com/MayorCouncil/>.