

Rock County Supervisor District 29—responses to League of Women Voters - Janesville questions.

Spring Election – April 3, 2018

Candidates: Karl Dommershausen, Tom Brien

#1. What are your views on the county’s responsibility toward at-risk children and youth, particularly those in foster care and juvenile justice facilities?

Karl Dommershausen: I serve on the Human Services Board and I know all exist and should be at the forefront of awareness and development. The foster care issue is important because of a shortage of foster parents and the low pay offered. I know that money is not always the issue, but foster care parenting is a full-time job and most foster parents take money out of their own pockets, so the children have a “normal” life. Our social workers, counselors, psychologists and other related personnel, work hard in their areas of expertise. Our personnel are outstanding, but funding and the number of personnel is an issue. The department works at finding grants and other sources of income to help fund additional personnel, but there also is a shortage of available workers in the area. We work closely with school districts and support each other in the care of our youth.

Add to these issues are the opioid and drug, human trafficking, and health issues, particularly lack of dental care, and transportation issues that present more barriers. I am on the Traffic Coordinating Committee and we see problems constantly. The state took away most control of the transportation methods for our people and scheduling has become difficult for many. We find the company very hard to get reports and information from.

The problem of juvenile offender housing is being challenged by the state not giving us clear direction. Madison vacillates, making us expend and waste valuable resources that could be used elsewhere.

Tom Brien: The county's responsibility is that whenever safe and possible youth with mental health needs should be prevented from entering the juvenile system. The more appropriate and effective way would be to use evidence-based intervention and treatment programs in community settings that produce positive results and are more cost effective. They still hold the youth accountable for their actions but would provide for their rehabilitation. Those that are in the Juvenile Justice system still deserve effective treatment.

In regards to foster care one of the biggest hurdles is not enough foster families and another is the lack of training for foster families. A big problem is the inequities of insurance coverage and the reimbursement for services. There is such a big difference between regular doctor visits and hospital stays and mental health visits and stays. The county's responsibility is to provide the training for the foster families and to provide the funds to hire as many professionals that they can. To lobby our elected officials to get parity between regular health coverage and mental health coverage. Janesville School system is starting a program to have mental health professionals available in the schools.

Another problem is the unknown effect closing Lincoln Hills will have on counties.

#2. What is the County’s role in supporting evidence-based policies and practices in treating mentally ill and/or addicted individuals and their families?

Tom Brien: The county's biggest responsibility is to provide adequate funding and resources to carry out the policies, procedures, and programs that they have identified and implemented for the evidence based policies.

I would support the League's position adopted May 2017 dealing with Behavior health.

Karl Dommershausen: There is an Evidence Based Decision Making Ad Hoc Committee at the County level, made up of County and Community members. Within this committee there is an internal department committee headed by Kate Luster, Director of Human Services, to design evidence-based results to facilitate decisions to guide what treatment paths are best. The Human Services Department is a complex and multi-faceted part of Rock County Government.

The findings of this committee are ongoing as of now and will be presented to the Human Services Board when more complete. This report will include mental health, opioid, addictions, family involvement and other relevant result areas. The actual inclusions and breath of the study is not currently ready for publishing but is not far away per an update at the March 14, 2018 Human Services Board meeting.

These issues are multifaceted and deserve ample study and constant refreshing even after the initial results are released. The internal department members are committed to thoroughness, speed, and accuracy. These reports will continue to be on-going into the future.

#3. Indicate why the residents should elect you to represent the #29 Rock County district.

Karl Dommershausen: I have been involved in many facets of County workings, including, but not limited to the many issues of the Human Services Board. I initiated a program to insure about 10 individuals left without insurance when the Developmental Disabilities Committee was dissolved. Only two were left without insurance for two months but did find a temporary solution until they were included in the Badger Care merger.

I also suggested better bidding practices to include more local companies. When I first started I noticed how few bids were being let to local entities. Brent Sutherland, Facilities Management Director, picked up on this and created additional paths for their awareness and involvement.

I have been active in ensuring more Dental involvement for vulnerable children and adults, with additional opportunities in the future. Over a period of years, I have encouraged the Janesville School District and County to form more partnerships involving Opioids, mental health, troubled youths, foster care, and other issues. I also was a co-founder of Project 16:49 to assist unaccompanied and homeless youths in Rock County. My being on the Janesville School Board is an asset to bring groups and government agencies together. I have a vision for possibilities.

I have been active in Rock County issues for almost 45 years and see many more opportunities for our youth and others to have better outcomes. This will involve partnerships from k-12 through colleges, trade schools, apprenticeships, and involve government, healthcare, and businesses. Community Action continues to be valuable partner.

Tom Brien: I came to Janesville in 1967 to start a 43year career at General Motors. I am currently the chair of the Local 95 retirees.

During that time I served on the Janesville City Council for 16 years -- as President (twice) and Vice-President (3 times). As President of the Council I helped lead Janesville through dealing with Ken Peterson and the KKK. For those efforts I was co-recipient of the first Local 95 Martin Luther King award. I helped start National Night Out, bike trail system, and helped develop the Janesville Leadership Academy.

I was on the United Way board for 10 years, co-chair of the United Way campaign that raised almost 2 million dollars.

I was elected to the Blackhawk Community Credit Union board for 8 years, am active in the Janesville Noon Lions and a past President.

Every board and elected office that I served on, I was part of the legislative committees with a good working relationship with our elected officials.

Governor Doyle appointed me to the Workforce Development Commission.

I served 1 term on the Rock County Board on the General Services and Land Conservation Committees. In Land Conservation we worked out ways to help farmers get equity out of their land and not have to sell it to developers. We also worked on the nitrate problem. I graduated from the Rural Leadership Program and UAW/GM paid education leave. My folks raised me to be active and give back to my community.