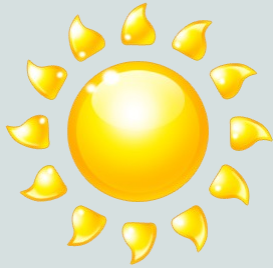




# The Examiner

<http://www.wcmea.com>

Summer 2012



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President's Message

1

Ashland County

2

Spring Conference

3

Legislative Update

4

Kewaunee County  
Vernon County

5  
5

Interesting Deaths

6

Upcoming Training

7

Go for the Gold!

8



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Anticipating that this may be my final "Message from the President" before the fall election, I want to express my gratitude to each of you for allowing me to represent you. This has been an interesting, yet wonderful two years as President.

As an old and established association we continue to experience much change. Current day expectations of the office most certainly are well beyond what was experienced by those from the early years of death investigators. Investigation numbers have increased, and the investigations themselves are certainly more complex. Disease and crime are rampant, yet funds available for getting the job done are ever diminishing. All things considered, it's a wonder why we do this job.

As President, I have had the opportunity to work with wonderful people that are dedicated to keeping this association strong through recruitment, legislation, fund raising and education. It is important for you to understand that without the efforts of the few, things would be very different for the many. We must continue to grow and to learn; to adapt and to share.

My primary concern for our association is the seemingly lack of participation in the semi-annual conferences.

Many people go to great lengths to put on a quality conference, yet numbers continue to dwindle. I am anxious; however, to see what sort of response we get by returning the conference to Madison this fall.

I am told that our Conference Director, Angela Hinze, and our Dane County hosts are planning a top notch conference that is posed to have multiple well renowned speakers from all over the country. Please do everything that you can to attend if possible.

I anxiously look forward to serving the members of the WCMEA as "Past President" knowing that my role will be vital to the association. I also look forward to working closely with the newly elected President, as there are many things to learn and yet to accomplish.

Please consider joining us in a leadership role, as it is very fulfilling and there is much to do.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

**AI**

## Ashland County Bids Farewell to Long-time Deputy Coroner

On May 1, 2012, Art Nelson, Deputy Coroner for Ashland County, retired after 34 years of service. Nelson was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. At the age of 15 years, his family moved to Ashland County, Wisconsin where he has remained. He began working as a carpenter and later became a bar owner/operator.

Nelson had a love for people and his community. He devoted much of his free time running with the local ambulance service as a volunteer EMT. At that time, there was only *the* coroner. When an Ashland County resident died at home, the ambulance crew stayed with the family and decedent until the coroner arrived to investigate the death. Nelson stated that there were times he would wait seven hours or more.

It wasn't too long before the realization came that one person to cover an entire county just wasn't enough.

In **1978**, Art Nelson volunteered to serve his county in yet another capacity. He became the first deputy coroner for Ashland County. Training was on the fly, but something that Nelson did not take lightly. He immersed himself in books and other literature, training himself to be the best medicolegal death investigator that he could be.

His first case was a true test of character. Nelson had been called to the residence of a man who had not been seen for several months. The death was a suicide, but thanks to a cold winter outside and a warm heater inside, advanced decomposition had overcome the home. This was something Nelson had never experienced before. It was so unsettling; he declared this to be not only his first case . . . but his last! Luckily for Ashland County, after several showers and much deliberation, Nelson decided to stick with it. Over the last 34 years, Nelson has seen many cases . . . some so tragic they made his heart ache, and others so touching they made his heart full. Regardless of the circumstances, his sense of dedication to his community and neighbors are what allowed Nelson persevere. He treated each case with meticulous enthusiasm. Each investigation was thorough and conclusive before Nelson placed his signature on a death certificate. He held steadfast in his methods, and despite the technologic advances, Nelson had remained the only deputy coroner in Ashland County to still use handwritten reporting . . . something he boasts with a chuckle.

Art Nelson is a man that leads by example. When asked what advice he has for novice medicolegal death investigators, he simply stated "Take pride in your work." Nelson warns that getting all of the facts is crucial to each case . . . something that cannot be done without ample time and patience.

Retirement is still new to Nelson. So new in fact, his heart still yearns for more. He has no big plans as of yet for this new found freedom, but hopes to spend quality time with family and friends.

Art Nelson is a remarkable man . . . a true treasure. His selfless devotion to his community dictated the way he lived his life. He will be greatly missed by Barb Beeksmas, Ashland County Coroner, her remaining staff, and the WCMEA. Congratulations Art on your well-deserved retirement!!

### **1978 FUN FACTS**

*The average household income was \$15,064*

*Gasoline was \$.63 per gallon*

*A postage stamp was 15 cents*

*Jimmy Carter, our 39<sup>th</sup> President, began the second year of his term*

*John D. Rockefeller III, US billionaire/philanthropist, dies at 71*

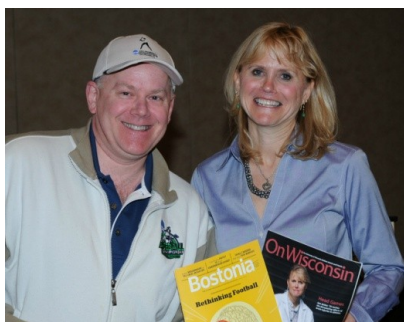
*The New York Yankees won the World Series for the second consecutive year*

*The Great Blizzard of 1978 struck the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes*

*The Dallas Cowboys defeated the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XII*

## Annual Spring WCMEA Conference

The 2012 Annual Training Conference was held in Appleton from April 2-April 4, 2012, at the beautiful Radisson Paper Valley. There were 48 attendees who enjoyed presentations from local and national names on topics ranging from Sudden Infant Deaths to Neuropathology of Dementia and Traumatic Encephalopathy. Dr. Ann McKee, a Wisconsin native and Professor of Neuropathology and Researcher of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy at Boston University, was the keynote speaker. This marked the first conference to offer an evening session open to the public. Dr. McKee presented her research regarding athletes and traumatic encephalopathy. The session was well-received by local athletic trainers, students, and death investigators alike.



*Dr. Ann McKee posing with local fan*



*Dr. Jason Jarzembowski (left) and  
Dr. Brian Peterson*



*Dr. Lynn Sheets*

Our gratitude goes to Angela Hinze, Columbia and Adams County Medical Examiner, for her hard work in making this conference a success. The WCMEA would also like to express thanks to our host Outagamie County, the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, as well as the many presenters, sponsors, and exhibitors for their time, hospitality, and expertise.



*Bio-Tec Vendors*



*Ruth Walgaert, Outagamie  
County Coroner*



*Wisconsin Donor Network, Live Organ Display*

## A Night to Remember

What better way to wrap-up the conference than a Luau-themed social event! Puro-Clean sponsored a killer shindig complete with hors d'oeuvres, beverages, and entertainment. Pat Pederson, a one-man band, wowed party-goers with his musical talent. . . the guests provided the comic relief!

*Pictured at right, Rebecca Quall, Paul Matlin, Mary Ricci  
and Laurie Ripp*



*Pat Pederson*

## Chapter 979 Legislative Update

For the past seven to eight years your legislative committee has been working with the state legislature in attempting to rewrite, then repeal and recreate WI. 979, the statutes that govern the practice of coroners/medical examiners. These statutes have not been updated in well over 30 years, and the practice and science of death investigations has obviously changed over time. We are attempting to address these changes . . . a process that the late John Stanley, Dane County Coroner, began and I have since taken over.

Over the past four years Al Klimek and I have been working with Representative Amy Sue Vruwink and her legislative aid in coordinating the changes that had been established by Coroner Stanley. We have been tweaking some language and working behind the scenes with other interested lobbyists, most recently the Wisconsin Hospital Association. We feel we have a good document and have put most, if not all, of the opposition behind us. LRB-1711 was created, and we are now ready for introduction.

What is probably the most glaring is the lack of minimal training standards outlined in the document. When we started down that road, we were met with fiscal roadblocks from both state and county agencies. Feeling that 979 had so many issues in and of itself, we decided to tackle the updates first. Once passed, we shall then move onto developing minimum training standards.

Outlined below are some of the major changes in 979. You may access the entire document through the legislative site of the state legislature website under LRB-1711, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov>.

- Reporting Deaths: The bill requires any person who has knowledge of a death must report it to the C/ME or law enforcement. The reporting must be immediate and also specifies law enforcement, health care provider, or funeral director who has knowledge outside of a hospital, nursing home, physician's office, or hospice. The bill also includes specific reporting requirements for deaths that occur in hospitals, nursing homes, hospices or physicians' offices. All deaths in emergency rooms must be reported. Specific hospice deaths are to be reported in accordance with the C/ME's written policy.
- Jurisdiction: The bill assigns jurisdiction to investigate a death to the C/ME. This prohibits any person from moving or altering the body without authorization from the C/ME. The bill makes it the responsibility of the C/ME to notify the next of kin. Also, the district attorney does not need to be notified on all deaths, and a written policy and waiver must be drafted by both the C/ME and DA.
- Autopsies: The bill requires the C/ME to order an autopsy for a death from a crime, a person under the age 18 that is unusual or unexplained, and any person that is in the custody or active pursuit of law enforcement, or incarcerated at any level in county, state, or federal jails or prisons. The bill repeals the mandatory autopsy for "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome," but does specify that if the term is going to be used it must be written in the autopsy report as being such. The bill repeals the requirement to take specimens from a deceased upon the request of a next of kin. It does allow us to assist in coordinating independent pathology-related services.

**Update Continued on Page 5**



**UPDATE Continued from Page 4**

- Investigation Records: The bill requires the C/ME to keep records of each death investigation and that those records are kept in an office that is owned or leased by the county. Records of autopsies and other diagnostic procedures will become confidential. The final C/ME report must remain confidential during the course of the investigation and only opened after consulting law enforcement and district attorney have finalized their investigations. The C/ME will have access to mental health treatment records without informed consent as we have now under Section 30.146.82 (1).
- Other: There are a number of clerical changes that deal with disposition of bodies such as *Authorization to embalm or dispose of a body*, *cremation permit* will become a *cremation release* and can only be issued after a certificate is completed with a cause/manner of death by a physician or C/ME and reviewed by the C/ME. Also, *Authorization to disinter and reinter, and dispositions of unidentified or unclaimed bodies*.

We are pleased with the product, but it is not perfect and discussions could be generated in debate. If there are any questions you may contact me, [Riflemas@co.portage.wi.us](mailto:Riflemas@co.portage.wi.us), or Al Klimek, [Klimek\\_AG@co.brown.wi.us](mailto:Klimek_AG@co.brown.wi.us).

Scott Rifleman, Portage County Coroner

**A New Beginning for Kewaunee County**

Following the death of David Hudson, Governor Scott Walker appointed Rory Groessl as the Kewaunee County Coroner on March 15, 2012. Groessl has a strong medical and educational background. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing. Groessl also serves as both a Firefighter/EMT and Registered Nurse, positions he has held since 2004.

Rory Groessl began working for the Kewaunee County Coroner's Office in 2007 as a deputy coroner, and now oversees a staff of five deputy coroners. He has begun catapulting the coroner's office into the modern-day by getting away from hand and type-written reporting, and moving toward electronic reporting. Groessl is also developing standard operating procedures for his current and future staff to provide consistent professionalism. He is the co-chair of the Kewaunee County Child Death Review Team, and is a new committee member for the northeast FIMR regional team.

Despite his new roles and responsibilities, Groessl finds that his greatest challenge is finding the perfect balance between his other jobs and the demands of being coroner. . . . A challenge he looks forward to overcoming.

**Vernon County Loses Deputy Coroner**

Myron Odegard died suddenly at his home on May 19, 2012. Odegard, only 55 years of age, was a fixture in his community. He worked as a registered nurse for 35 years at a local nursing home, was Captain of the Viroqua Fire Department, and served as Deputy Coroner for Vernon County. Odegard was cherished by friends, family, and peers alike. On behalf of the WCMEA, I offer Vernon County and the Odegard Family my deepest sympathies.



***Interesting Deaths in Wisconsin.....***

- In **Milwaukee County**: A fire raged through a 12-unit apartment building in the City of Milwaukee killing a 21-month old girl. Everyone else in the apartment building escaped.
- In **Waukesha County**: A 23-year old man lost control of his motorcycle as he was driving out of the parking lot following his shift at an Oconomowoc independent living facility. He was transported to a local hospital where he later died. He was not wearing a helmet.
- In **Lincoln County**: A 56-year old pedestrian was struck in the parking lot of a Gleason bowling alley by a truck. The man was transported to a Wausau hospital where he later died. Alcohol was believed to have been a factor.
- In **La Crosse County**: A 20-year old woman was the victim of a shooting. The part-time college student and waitress was shot in her apartment. She was transported to a local hospital where she later died. Police are investigating a possible connection between this death and an earlier drive-by shooting. This marked the second homicide in La Crosse for the month of March and marked the most violent stretch for the city in almost 10 years.
- In **Washington County**: A 20-year old male was shot and killed on the front porch of a Slinger home. The young man had been partying at the neighbor's home. The party got out of hand, and the authorities were notified. The police responded; however, left after receiving no cooperation. The party-goers were later forced to leave by the host parents, and many fled by foot. The victim ran and hid on a nearby porch, alarming the occupants. The homeowner, fearful of a home invasion, called out to the young man and fired one fatal shot.
- In **Door County**: An elderly couple was flying their private plane from Florida back to the Cherryland Airport in Door County when the 81-year old pilot suffered a fatal heart attack. His 80-year old wife, who is not a licensed pilot, was forced to take control of the aircraft and make a dramatic landing with the help of air traffic controllers.
- In **Rock County**: A 27-year old man, wanted on a felony, shot himself in the head in a wooded area along the Wisconsin-Illinois state line. The armed man crossed the state line in the early morning hours on his bicycle in an attempt to escape authorities. He abandoned his bicycle and continued on foot. Both Boone County (IL) and Rock County Sheriff Departments were in pursuit when the man pulled out a handgun. A Boone County Deputy Sheriff fired a shot before the man fatally injured himself. An autopsy later determined that the deputy did not hit the man.
- In **Kenosha County**: A 37-year old male was found deceased along Lake Michigan in the City of Kenosha. The man was discovered by two boys playing lakeside who notified authorities. The man had been missing since February. There was no evidence of foul play.
- In **Dodge County**: A 5-year old boy stepped out from behind a legally parked car on a local street into traffic. The child was struck by a truck, and transported to an area hospital where he later died. Speed and/or alcohol were not factors in the incident, and charges are unlikely.
- In **Washington County**: A body was found inside a submerged vehicle in a private pond. A maintenance worker found the car after the sun reflected off the metal. Foul play was not suspected. The car may have been there since the fall of 2011.

DEATHS Continued on Page 7

**DEATHS Continued from Page 6**

- In **Milwaukee County**: A 40-year old mother and her 22-year old son died in separate motor vehicle crashes only hours apart. The 40-year old woman had been lying in the middle of a West Allis street when she was struck by a vehicle that sped away from the scene. She was transported to a local hospital where she later died. Her 22-year old son was killed in a vehicle that overturned on the way to the hospital to check on his mother. Alcohol is suspected in both crashes.
- In **Portage County**: Three men; ages 19, 25 and 29 years, died in a fiery crash in the Town of Linwood. The men were heading west on State 66 when their truck left the roadway, overcorrected, and slid into a ditch. The vehicle struck a utility pole and embankment before it came to rest and burst into flames. Alcohol and speed are believed to have contributed.
- In **Washington County**: A 3-year old girl was found deceased in her home after a local doctor's office called 911 to alert authorities of an "unresponsive child." When police arrived at the apartment, the young girl was found deceased with injuries of her face and body. The girl's mother and her boyfriend were arrested on suspicion of child abuse and neglect resulting in death.
- In **Brown County**: A 35-year old man was attacked with several knives by his girlfriend who stabbed him in the chest during an argument. He was transported to a local hospital where he later died. The couple had ongoing domestic issues according to police.
- In **Marathon County**: A 48-year old man was found trapped inside his Jeep Cherokee. The vehicle had been traveling westbound when it left the roadway, rolled over, and struck a tree. The man was extricated by EMS and flown by helicopter to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead. The cause of the crash was unknown.
- In **Milwaukee County**: a 3 ½ -month old girl died of electrocution after sleeping in a bed with her mother and another child. The infant had been lying between the bed and the wall, in contact with metal coils of a baseboard heater. The back of her head touched the metal bed frame. A WE energies representative reported that the metal leg of the bed frame touched an extension cord with an exposed wire. The extension cord was connected to several electronic devices. The cause of death was listed as "low voltage electrocution" and manner was ruled accidental according to the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office.

**Upcoming Training Opportunities**

Fall WCMEA Conference and Annual Meeting  
 Sheraton Conference Center, Madison  
 October 8-10, 2012

\*\*\*\*

St. Louis University School of Medicine  
 Medicolegal Death Investigator Training Course  
 August 6-10, 2012 at St. Louis, Missouri  
[www.medschool.slu.edu/mlidi](http://www.medschool.slu.edu/mlidi) for more information

\*\*\*\*

2012 NAME Annual Meeting  
 October 5-10, 2012 in Baltimore, Maryland  
[www.thename.org](http://www.thename.org) for more information

Cold Case, Unidentified and Missing Persons  
 Fox Valley Technical College  
 October 2-4, 2012  
 Contact: Lisa Bell (920) 993-5258

\*\*\*\*

Basic Training for the Medicolegal Death Investigator  
 Albuquerque, New Mexico. Presented by the New Mexico  
 Office of the Medical Examiner  
 October 15-17, 2012  
 Contact Yvonne Gomez, 505-272-3053 for more information

\*\*\*\*

2012 IAC & ME Conference  
 Las Vegas, Nevada, June 24-28, 2012  
 Go to: [www.theiacme.com](http://www.theiacme.com) for more information

Patrice Hall & Jennifer Schroeter  
Kenosha ME's Office  
8600 Sheridan Road  
Kenosha, WI 53143  
(262) 653-3869

## ***GO FOR THE GOLD!!***



dreamstime.com

Show us your talent Wisconsin! *The Examiner* wants your interesting case investigations, and/or special WCMEA members to highlight in the fall publication. Please submit your case reports or personal entries to editors Patrice Hall or Jennifer Schroeter by **August 31, 2012**.

Forward submissions via e-mail:

[patrice.hall@kenoshacounty.org](mailto:patrice.hall@kenoshacounty.org)

[jennifer.schroeter@kenoshacounty.org](mailto:jennifer.schroeter@kenoshacounty.org)

Or via USPS to:

**Kenosha County Medical Examiner's Office  
8600 Sheridan Road  
Kenosha, WI 53143**