

ON THE BALLOT: CARLTON COUNTY ATTORNEY

Incumbent Thom Pertler and challenger Lauri Ketola are running for Carlton County Attorney.

1. What experience and strengths do you bring to the County Attorney's Office?

It's been a privilege serving the citizens of Carlton County for the last 23-plus years, 10 years as an assistant attorney and the last 13 as Carlton County Attorney. During this tenure I've had the opportunity to work in every aspect of the county attorneys office – from traffic court to prosecution of high-profile complex first-degree murder trials. No one wants to think about a heinous crime in our community, but if it happened I am the only candidate with substantial experience prosecuting and convicting criminals in these matters. I am a career prosecutor and have dedicated my career to public service. I am not a politician looking to climb the ladder to a higher office, nor am I running on a whim. This has been my life for the last 23 years. I'm committed to it. Making our community a safer place for individuals and families is my primary focus and passion.

I am a founding member of the Carlton County Drug Court where we work to combat the opioid crisis as well as other drug use on our county. The county attorney's office and local law enforcement have been proactive and aggressive in combating drugs because of the ripple effect drugs have on the community, families and children.

I am a strong advocate for victims of crime and recognize the importance of communication with victims so they understand timelines and are comfortable with the way their case is progressing. I serve as attorney for the county regarding various matters – depending on the day and issue at hand, including land and zoning, human services, the highway department and others.

For the last 13 years I've served as administrator for the county attorney's office, hiring, managing and supervising staff while maintaining my own caseload of legal files. I work in tandem with other members of the legal community – judges, police, sheriff's office, attorneys, probation and more. Equally important, my experience is current and up-to-date. A lot has changed in 20 years. During that time I've stayed the course and never quit while adapting to critical changes firsthand and gaining the experience Carlton County has come to expect. Experience is key. You can't buy it. You have to earn it.

I have demonstrated my commitment to the citizens of Carlton County for more than two decades. I've served in various volunteer positions including youth football coach, youth hockey board member and tournament coach, youth soccer coordinator and coach, Habitat for Humanity, Library Board President, Sunday school teacher and school volunteer. I care about our community and I care about this job. My wife, Jill, and I have raised our four children here.

With your support, I am asking that you give me the honor and privilege of continuing to provide the best legal services to all Carlton County citizens



Pertler

in the position your county attorney.

Do you see your role in the Carlton County jail study implementation?

I see the county attorney's office having a definite role in the process. We work closely with the sheriff's office; our work impacts theirs and vice versa. I see myself as being part of the team that is tasked with examining the issue and the various options for addressing the current jail shortage problem by finding a better, long-term solution for Carlton County.

What initiatives should be promoted by the county attorney to make Carlton County a safer place addressing the opioid use explosion and addressing limited placement options for our mentally ill?

Unfortunately, here in Carlton County we have more than our share of drug crimes. My office, along with local law enforcement, has been proactive and aggressive when dealing with drugs in the county because drugs and drug crimes have a ripple effect on the community, touching families and children.

I am a founding member of the Carlton County Drug Court and wholeheartedly support its premise. We have years of data and results that show drug courts are making our streets safer and improving the lives of people who are struggling with addiction. Studies from around the nation, where drug courts are in place, show that participants are not reoffending and are becoming lawful and productive members of their communities.

After decades of fighting the war on drugs, I realize we need to be willing to embrace new ideas to combat the problem, which includes dealing with underlying issues that can lead us to real solutions. I'm not sure there is one pat answer to resolve the war on drugs, but drug court is a new and innovative initiative that will reduce crime in our community and greatly reduce recidivism.

Mental health is a serious problem in our county and across the nation. It is often intertwined with drug abuse resulting in a dual diagnosis. Our drug court addresses this by making appropriate referrals for mental health services when needed. But it is often a struggle to find a suitable placement for people in need of inpatient mental health services.

Do you think you as county attorney should partner with the sheriff on her task force?

I wouldn't use the term partner, but I do see the county attorney's office as having an important voice and a role in addressing the issue of the shortage of jail space. I support implementing the recommendations of the study completed on behalf of the county board to address the issue of jail space.

Right now we don't have enough space and have to transport prisoners to other facilities in other counties. This is costly and is not a long-term solution. Carlton County needs the space to house our own prisoners, and it looks like one of the most viable answers to this is increased jail space.

1. What experience and strengths do you bring to the County Attorney's Office?

I have practiced law for 25 years, with fifteen years of private litigation experience. I also have previous experience in both civil and criminal matters while working at the Carlton County Attorney's Office. In my previous employment with the Carlton County Attorney's Office I handled among other things, all crimes against children, including sex crimes. Due to the sensitive, and often complex, nature of these cases they required sensitivity and dedication to prosecute. In an effort to successfully prosecute these cases I availed myself of all possible trainings and certifications. I then assembled a team of pertinent people including law enforcement officials from various agencies and child protection workers from Fond Du Lac and Carlton County. In the first three years, as a team, we obtained many successful convictions including numerous jury convictions in felony criminal sexual conduct cases sending predators to prison. I say this because one of my strengths is identifying a problem and providing a workable solution.

In addition, I am passionate about serving our community and making it a better place to live and flourish. Sixteen years ago, I put a team of volunteers together to start a local branch of Young Life in Cloquet, Esko and Carlton with the goal of building bridges between caring adults and high school students and providing them safe people and places to navigate the high school years and share with them the love of God. This required recruiting, training and leading a team of volunteers and board members, raising a budget, developing great working relationships with students, the local schools, parents and community members and ultimately gaining their trust. In the past 16 years, Young Life has impacted the lives of over 1,000 students and continues under the direction of a full-time director.

I have also served for more than 12 years on the Cloquet Citizen Advisory Board, a subcommittee of Cloquet City Council. The Board is responsible for hiring, promoting, and disciplining police officers. In this capacity, I often made difficult and unpopular decisions that were in the best interest of our community. In addition, I have volunteered as a Guardian ad Litem, as chair for Relay for Life, Women of Faith, and in various capacities within Cloquet schools. I care about the people in this community and will work hard to make it a safer place to live.

I take my role as a leader seriously. For the past 15 years, I have attended the Global Leadership Summit to develop my leadership skills, I attended Blandin Leadership training with a cohort from Carlton County and I regularly educate and challenge myself on leadership best practices.

Lastly, and most importantly, I strive to live my life with honesty and integrity.

2. How do you see your role in the Carlton County Jail Study Initiative?

I have reviewed the jail study and have met with the Carlton County Sheriff, Moose Lake Chief of Police, Warden of the Moose Lake Prison and County Coordinator to discuss, among other things, the jail study and the role of the County Attorney in addressing jail space shortage. These individuals and the jail study identified a number of issues that require the attention of the County Attorney. The study found the jail population is unnecessarily inflated by ineffective criminal justice system case processing practices. The study also found that court continuances are a primary problem that are further complicated by inconsistencies in plea agreements. In light of these finding,

I see my role as working cooperatively with law enforcement and the courts to file criminal complaints in a timely manner, develop and implement a clear diversion program, use the Court's time more efficiently and develop clear guidelines for plea agreements. Moreover, I will reach out to other counties who have addressed jail overpopulation and learn from their failures and successes and implement best practices.

3. What initiatives should be promoted by the Carlton County Attorney to have Carlton County a safer place, addressing opioid drug explosion and limited places for the mentally ill?

Undoubtedly, Carlton County is experiencing the full effects of the opioid epidemic. I have attended two separate conferences on the opioid epidemic this past year to learn more about the problem and hear from communities who have successfully addressed the problem and are seeing a decrease in opioid use and deaths in their communities. Combating this issue requires



Ketola

addressing three separate layers: prevention, addressing the needs of those already addicted, and the illegal sale of opioids in the community. First, there is a need for ongoing education and awareness for the medical community and the public to understand how addictive opioids are when used for long term pain management and finding alternatives to pain management in an effort to prevent addiction. Second, addressing the needs of those already addicted to opioids which includes proper mental health treatment. At this point, there is a shortage of treatment options and aftercare support. I will work with others to look for viable means to address this shortage. Lastly, dealing swiftly and firmly with those who sell or distribute opioids in our county, including long jail sentences to remove drug dealers from our community and send the message that we will not tolerate drug dealers destroying the good people in our community.

As a Young Life leader, I unfortunately saw the devastation of opioid addiction, including the death of two young men I knew. I have walked in friendship with students and young adults as they fought the demons of drug addiction and mental illness and I'm sick and tired of watching peoples' lives destroyed by drug addiction. In response, approximately eight years ago, I assembled a drug task force to address this issue. The task force consisted of school administrators, school counselors, law enforcement from various agencies, probation officers, representatives from treatment programs, mental health professionals and others from around the county. The task force began addressing the problem of addiction and later became the Drug Prevention Coalition of which I am a parent representative. I will continue to work collaboratively with all pertinent agencies to address the opioid epidemic at all levels.

4. Do you think you, as the County Attorney, should partner with the Sheriff on her Task Force?

I believe it is of utmost importance for the County Attorney to work closely and cooperatively with Sheriff Lake on all matters including, but not limited to, the Drug Task Force. I have a great relationship with Sheriff Lake and share her passion and desire to make Carlton County a safe and pleasant place to live. As such, I look forward to the opportunity to partner with Sheriff Lake to address among many matters, the investigation and prosecution of drug crimes.