

Safety SCENE

By Luke Hennen
Scott County Sheriff



New court eReminders will ultimately save taxpayers money

People miss court dates for various reasons -- from forgetting the date, to conflicts with work and child care, to difficulties navigating the court system. To help with this, the Minnesota Judicial Branch is now offering optional text and email reminders, or "eReminders," for upcoming court appearances, much the same way dental clinics call to remind patients about their appointments.

Missing a court date can lead to very serious consequences, including additional fines, fees, court dates, and even jail time. A warrant for arrest is typically issued when someone fails to appear for a court date. Once a warrant is issued, any contact the person has with law enforcement will result in an arrest on the outstanding warrant, even if that new contact is unrelated to any criminal conduct. For example, if a person is pulled over for a broken headlight, they could be taken to jail on an outstanding warrant. This can be costly to the person arrested and, ultimately, for local taxpayers.

As soon as people are arrested, the county has a number of responsibilities, among them may be to provide medical care, transportation to the jail/courts (sometimes from across the state), and to house them in jail. (In 2018, the average daily per-inmate cost to taxpayers to house an inmate in the Scott County Jail was \$148.) Further, additional costs are incurred through general processing procedures and ensuring timely and accurate coordination between agencies or departments. If we can keep people out of jail with a simple text/email reminder of their upcoming court date, we should be able to save a significant amount of money for the County, the defendant, his/her community, as well as the justice system.

A pilot version of the eReminders program in Hennepin County showed 35 percent increase in the rate at which people showed up to court hearings, and a striking 25 percent reduction in the number of people arrested for missing court dates. If we can replicate this success, the Scott County Sheriff's Office could see our annual 6,000 warrants drop significantly -- which could mean substantial savings for County residents.

The eReminders service is easy to use. Parties in eligible case types in Minnesota District (Trial) Court can enroll to receive hearing eReminders via text or email -- which will send date, time, and location reminders of your upcoming court appearances. In most cases, the system will send a reminder three days before the hearing and another one day in advance. (While the eReminders provide notification of the date, time, and location of the hearing, they do not replace an official notice to appear. They simply offer an optional courtesy service.)

Reminding people to come to court is a simple and easy method to improve hearing attendance, which allows for a more reliable scheduling of court appearances; creates a more user-friendly court system; saves significant justice system resources; reduces the jail population, the number of bench warrants for failures to appear, and the financial burden for taxpayers; and allows law enforcement to focus in other areas where we can have a much greater impact.

Instructions for enrolling and information on eligible case types are online at the Minnesota Judicial Branch's web portal at mncourts.gov/Hearing-eReminders.

If you have questions about eReminders, please feel free to contact me anytime using one of the following methods: by email at lhennen@co.scott.mn.us; by phone at (952) 496-8625; via social media @sheriffhennen; or by mail or in person at Scott County Sheriff's Office, 301 Fuller Street South, Shakopee, MN 55379. You can also visit our website at www.scottcountymn.gov.

Extension offers workshop Jan. 27 on financing for college

Do you have a teen that is planning on or considering going to college next fall? Whether they are the first in the family to attend or in a long line of college graduates, you may have questions about how to fund college and the experiences that go with it.

The Transition to College: Finances class discusses the financial topics that college brings up, including financial aid, insurance, and "fun" money. We will begin to develop a spending plan for everyone to get on board with and

prevent confusion of who is paying (or not paying) for what. We will talk briefly on the academic challenges college can bring and how to develop good habits to combat the challenges.

Transition to College: Finances will be offered on Monday, Jan. 27 from 6:30 - 8 p.m. at the SCALE Regional Training Facility in Jordan. There is no cost to attend, but please call the Scott County Extension office at (952) 492-5379 to register.



Library News

Winter Reads program lets you participate from home

Old Man Winter has settled in for the season, but don't let the thought of these cold, dark days get you down. This happens to be one of the best times of the year to catch up on your reading! Did you miss something by your favorite author? A bestseller that everyone you know has already read and keeps coming up in conversation? Or perhaps you have a list you've been meaning to get to. Maybe you just need a little incentive...

Winter Reads, our winter reading program for adults, runs from January 1 through February 29 (an extra day thanks to Leap Year!). And it's easy to participate -- just keep track of the books you've read or listened to, write a quick (or long) review of each, and be eligible for weekly prize drawings. If you don't want to shovel your car out or cross-country ski to your local library, you can participate from the comfort of your own home -- just use our online program on Beanstack. In fact, if you have a tablet or smartphone, you can just down-



load your book or audio book directly from the Scott County Library website, and never need to leave the couch.

In addition, we offer reading suggestions, links to various award-winning title lists, and programs tied to books and authors. Feel like discussing books with other people? Don't forget to check out the book clubs at the Savage, Prior Lake, and Jordan libraries.

For details on the *Winter Reads* program, visit the Scott County Library website at www.scottlib.org/WinterReads.

Remembering Mary Freyberg, Scott County Law Librarian

Mary Freyberg, Scott County Law Librarian, died on Oct. 13, 2019. *SCENE* readers will be familiar with Mary's columns about the Law Library, but that only tells part of the story.

Mary was a supportive friend, a humble (but extremely passionate!) public servant, and a champion for those seeking access to justice. People who entered her office in distress left holding their heads high. She transformed the lives of customers and the lives of colleagues alike. Many will miss her greatly.

Mary worked for Scott County from 1988-1994 and 1998-2019 for a total of 27 years of service. Mary's career had many high points: performing the Heimlich to rescue a four-year-old who was choking on a piece of gum at the Shakopee Library; receiving a Meritorious Service award for excellence in customer service; receiving another Meritorious Service award for excellence in collaboration; and receiving the Amicus Curiae ("friend of the court")



Mary Freyberg

award for service from Minnesota's First Judicial District for the bankruptcy, divorce, and foreclosure clinics, as well as her outreach to Spanish-speakers.

Perhaps it is best to let Mary have the last word. She appreciated the recognition she received for the big things she did, but she always came back to her passion for serving the person standing across the desk from her. When asked what she enjoyed most about her job, Mary said, "I enjoy working one on one with law library customers. Most people come in very anxious. I feel that if they leave with the resources they need to proceed with whatever court-related activity they have that we have succeeded in giving them what they need."



SmartLink
LINKING PEOPLE TO TRANSPORTATION

Wanted: Volunteer Drivers

SmartLink is seeking additional Volunteer Drivers to help drive individuals without vehicles in our community. Volunteer Drivers are essential to filling transportation gaps by providing rides to medical appointments, shopping, and other destinations in and around Scott County. The benefits of being a Volunteer Driver are many, and include:

- Knowing that you're making a difference in the community.
- Flexible scheduling -- you decide when, where, and how often you drive.
- An ability to donate time, rather than money, to help others.
- Mileage reimbursement -- you can use your own vehicle.
- A free Defensive Driving course through Scott County, resulting in lower insurance costs.

If you are looking for a way to give back within your community and feel being a Volunteer Driver is the right fit for you, please contact transit@co.scott.mn.us or call (952) 496-8341, option 2.



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