



On the Gulch

A Newsletter For and About City of Helena Employees

Division Highlight: Utility Customer Services

The Utility Customer Service Division provides billing for water, sewer, firelines, false alarms and commercial garbage accounts. We have recently added business licenses, dog licenses, and new residential garbage assessments and will soon be adding the curbside recycling billing to our duties. We serve as a backup to the Finance Department for Accounts Payable and to the Transfer Station for monthly billing.



Do you know these names?
Check page 2 for answers!

"I'm calling to let you know about outstanding customer service I received from the city utility customer services division.

Last week I received a call from one of the women in that office. She said she had reviewed a few months of my water use and that it seemed to really go up dramatically this month. She suggested that I check my interior connections, sinks, toilets, to make sure I didn't have a leak.

As a matter of fact, I did have a leak in my downstairs sink. She not only saved me pouring money down the drain on my bill, she saved my house from real damage.

Now THAT's customer service."

Our office receives payments through mail, online, in person, and over the phone. **On a typical month our office processes an average of 9,020 payments totaling over \$1,000,000.** We start a delinquency process each month on the 5th. That means a notice is mailed out to remind customers of their due date and what the penalty is if water is shut off. **On average, our department processes notices for over 300 delinquent accounts each month.** We audit payment plans and budget billing agreements and provide courtesy calls when customers are not following through on their plans.

Throughout the month we work with a variety of departments and local agencies to provide and to receive updated information about properties in our city.

We work with the transfer station to update commercial sanitation accounts, set up new accounts, and perform account maintenance to ensure accurate bills and information to customers.

We also work with the local title insurance companies on a daily basis about homes and businesses that are transferring ownership. We have the meter department do a special meter reading for the date of closing. Once we receive the meter reads, we calculate and provide the title companies with the amount that is owed up to that time because that amount is withheld from the seller's proceeds and a check sent to us to clear the account. They provide us with the new owner information to ensure we have the most up-to-date information as customers sometimes fail to notify us. We perform account maintenance to final the seller's account and begin the buyer's account.

As a department, customer service is our top priority. We work with internal customers to make sure they are receiving the information they need to make decisions. With our external customers, we strive to help them by answering questions, paying attention to details, and making sure their accounts are accurate.

Have questions about what we do? Stop by or call! x8450

We generate reports for other departments using data we collect on our customers and properties. Departments use these to make decisions on materials, staffing, capital investments, and more. **Here are just a few of the reports we provide:**

Building Permit Audit: Building permits purchased and permits that are complete and have an account established. If an account doesn't have any activity, we ask the Water Maintenance Department do a physical audit to follow up on it.

Service Order Tracking: Provided to the Meter Maintenance Supervisor to track service orders that his employees did that month.

Monthly Customers: Provide the Support Services Division with the most current owners of properties.

Monthly Sewer Consumption Report: Reveals classifications (single family, multi family, and commercial) and the amount of sewer consumption billed for the month. We can track monthly consumption to compare it to projections for project management purposes.

Parks Monthly Consumption: Provided to the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Parks Maintenance Supervisor, the report shows the current monthly water consumption for each city park and compares it to the previous year. This allows them to track drastic changes on a monthly basis, and compare to the previous year as well for budget purposes and to identify problems.

Commercial Sewer Decrease greater than 50 units: This identifies any commercial property that has had 50 units or greater decrease in their sewer usage from previous year same month. This helps identify commercial meters that possibly are slowing down. This report is provided to the Meter Maintenance Supervisor.

**Pictured on the front from left to right:
Loretta Boynton, Amy Hall, Crystal Nance, Darla Flansaas*

Employee News

Welcome to:

Michael Hoffman—Civic Center Building Maint.

Congratulations to:

Helena Fire Chief, Sean Logan; Fire Administrative Coordinator, Nanette Harris, and Lt. Keith Simendinger on their upcoming retirements! Thank you for your many years of service to the City of Helena.

You will be missed!



Goodbye & Welcome!

It's that time in our city's cycle when we get to welcome two new city commissioners and to say goodbye to two of our current commissioners.

Congratulations to Ed Noonan & Robert Ferris-Olson, elected to serve beginning January 1, 2016! We are looking forward to working with you in continuing to build and improve the quality of life for our residents. Commissioners Noonan & Ferris-Olson will take the seats of Commissioners Katherine Haque-Hausrath & Matt Elsaesser.

Thanksgiving Recipes

**Provided by Sarah Elkins*

Real Cranberry Relish - Easy & Delicious!

Rinse 1 bag of fresh cranberries well. Put them into a medium saucepan and add water to just below the surface of the fruit, usually about 1.5 cups.

Add 1/2 cup brown sugar & 1/2 cup real maple syrup.

Add 1/4 cup orange juice and a tablespoon of chopped orange rind. Add a sprinkle of salt.

Simmer on low heat until the cranberries are tender and a syrup has formed, usually about 45 minutes.

Remove from heat and sprinkle cinnamon & nut-



Espresso Cheesecake

Crust: Use a food processor or food chopper to make 2 cups of ground cookies, I like to use equal parts Oreo & Nutter Butter cookies. In a medium bowl, mix the ground cookies with a stick of melted butter, and then put the mixture into a springform pan, pressing the cookie mixture evenly across the bottom and up the sides about an inch. Set the pan aside.

Filling: Mix two softened cream cheese bricks with two eggs, 1/2 cup heavy cream, 1/4 cup espresso or coffee, two tablespoons coffee liqueur (Kahlua or generic), 1/2 cup of brown sugar, 1 tablespoon lemon juice.

Place the pan on the center rack in your preheated, 325° oven for about an hour. When you move the pan, the center (about 2-inch diameter) should jiggle just a little bit.

Let the cheesecake cool for a minimum of 4 hours. It's best to refrigerate over night if possible.

**Sarah Elkins has worked in the City Manager's Office since January, 2013. She has lived in Helena since 1999 and has two sons, 17 & 14, who go to school at Helena High School. She moved to Helena from Washington DC. She says the only things she really misses from the city are the restaurants and the easier & less*

New Shanghai Circus, January 28

Get your tickets online: www.helenaciviccenter.com



Adopt-A-Family!

It's that time again, our opportunity to help local families in need. Our committee has selected families to fill their Christmas wish lists and their pantries. Come to the Administrative Services office beginning December 1st to pick out your tags and make the holiday season a time for celebration for Helena families.

Call or email Loretta with questions: 447-8430, lburnham@helenamt.gov

