

## County seeking medical examiner

By Amy Smith Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, November 14, 2014 9:38 am

JEFFERSON — Voters might have noticed a position missing from the ballot in the Nov. 4 election.

The previously elected Jefferson County coroner position, which traditionally would have been up for election this fall, is being replaced with an appointed medical examiner after the county's current coroner, Patrick Theder, announced in March that he would not seek re-election.

The hiring process for an appointed medical examiner was to begin today, Jefferson County human resources director Terri M. Palm-Kostroski reported. She said the county plans to select a candidate in time for him or her to be appointed by the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors at its Dec. 9 meeting.

After Theder's retirement announcement in March, the county was left with the decision whether it would make the changes to the position that the coroner himself recommended.

Under state law, each county must employ either a coroner or a medical examiner to handle death investigations. The only difference between the two positions is that a coroner is an elected position, open to any resident over the age of 18, while a medical examiner is appointed. That leaves the county free to set qualifications such as required medical experience.

Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said Theder has been pushing for the change in order to protect the quality of the position, as there would be no assurance that the next elected coroner has any medical experience without the county being able to place requirements on the job description.

Medical examiners commonly are medical professionals such as doctors or nurses, and frequently carry a certification from the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

For the past several months, Palm-Kostroski has spent time researching similar positions in other Wisconsin counties to put together a job description for the candidate search, as well as gauge the position's appropriate salary level. The salary range included in the job description on the Jefferson County website for the part-time position is between \$45,490 and \$58,500.

Applicants, according to the job description, are required to have an associate degree in nursing, chemistry, biology, medicine, pre-med, paramedic, EMT, forensic science, criminal justice or a closely related field and two years of medical investigative experience.

Applicants also must have approved training in death investigation within one year of beginning the job.

Wehmeier noted the appointed position will function in the same way as the elected position except that it will be subject to job performance evaluations like other county department head and employee.

Early on, the county had discussed partnering with a neighboring county to share the position as a cost-saving measure.

However, Wehmeier said, he since found out that the county's ideal partners in that scenario, Rock and Walworth counties, still utilize the coroner system and don't have concrete plans to change within the year.

In December 2013, the county Human Resources Committee approved the county medical examiner's position at the end of the coroner's current term, which expires Jan. 4, 2014.

Theder first was appointed Jefferson County coroner in 1997 by then-Gov. Tommy Thompson, filling the post left by Scott Galston.

He since has been re-elected to the office six times.

Prior to serving as coroner, Theder retired as the captain of the Watertown Fire Department.