

## Two seek District 30 county board seat in April election

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KOSHKONONG — Two candidates are seeking the District 30 seat on the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors in the April 5 election.

Spring voters will decide whether to retain Walt Christensen as their representative or give the seat to challenger Gary Kutz.

The district includes Wards 4-6 in the Town of Koshkonong and Ward 1 in the Town of Sumner.

The candidates were asked to provide the Daily Union with information on their background, experiences and top issues of concern related to being a county supervisor. Here are their responses, with the incumbent listed first.

### Walt Christensen

Incumbent Supervisor Walt Christensen was first elected to the Jefferson County Board in 2008.

He currently serves on the Farmland Conservation Easement Commission, Parks and Highway committees, Lake Ripley Management District and Wisconsin Counties Utility Tax Association.

In addition to those assignments, Christensen said, he regularly attends the county board's Finance, Administration and Rules, and Infrastructure committee meetings.

“One self-imposed rule I like to follow when in a meeting is to keep in mind the point of view of the many citizens who cannot attend,” he said. “I consider all the people who must stay home to take care of kids, or who have a job or time conflict, but whose lives would be affected by county action. Are their concerns being addressed?”

Christensen said he is available regularly at the Fort Atkinson Farmers Markets, town board and city council meetings and other county events.

“I like communicating with people, hearing their concerns, doing research and then getting back to them,” he said. “I now have 12 years of experience in local government, eight on the Jefferson County Board, and I've learned that there is great reward in engaging with and serving our community.”

Christensen noted that he originally ran for public office because he was concerned about the loss of farmland and the expansion of a landfill.

However, in the years since, he has learned that there are many ways that county government helps the community.

“I want to continue to be part of that work,” Christensen said. “After these eight years, I am getting a handle on Robert’s Rules, and that — with my problem-solving experience as an inventor, resistance to frustration gained from my occupation as a mechanic, plus the training for cool detachment in art criticism I learned while getting a bachelor’s degree in art — makes me think I have more to give Jefferson County.”

He cited the importance of local control, the heroin epidemic, global warming and government efficiency as being among the top issues facing the county.

“A major challenge for Jefferson County is to continue to provide great service in a state that is taking away local control,” Christensen said. “Not long ago, Wisconsin understood that local officials had both the best interest of constituents and knowledge of their needs and so were best equipped to implement programs mandated by the state.”

More recently, he suggested, the state Legislature has been implementing policies removing local control.

“As a result, the county must give up protecting our waterways from destructive practices like dredging, swallow a reduction in funding for the Clean Sweep program that keeps hazardous materials out of ditches and landfills, and work with a budget cut to UW-Extension that will weaken family programs and reduce local planning assistance,” Christensen said.

In addition, he cited the statutory requirement that keeps revenue increases below inflation is a situation that cannot be sustained.

Another issue Christensen said the county is facing is opioid addiction.

“Heroin’s grip on users has a power that challenges our professionals’ and departments’ abilities and affects the entire county budget,” he said. “We are fortunate to have highly capable professionals working every day to get ahead of this problem. The county board will continue to support our departments at the front lines.”

Christensen suggested that the most under-rated issue challenging county government is preparing for and reacting to the changes brought on by global warming.

“This issue, heretofore of secondary concern, will soon be primary,” he said. “Planet-wide, climate changes will mean lower crop yields, flooding here and drought there, rising seas pushing millions inland. These negative effects are already happening.”

For Jefferson County, Christensen said, the challenge is to keep on doing what it has been doing and stay mindful of protecting resources instead of being pressured into converting them to frivolous uses or to cash them in.

“They were here when we arrived and they should be intact and ready to use when we pass them on,” Christensen said. “Your grandchildren are depending on us.”

Lastly, he said, it is important for county government to continue to seek ways to be innovative and efficient. He cited the long debate on the new Highway Department facility.

Christensen acknowledged that he favored a new shop on the original site, but admits he is impressed with the new facility.

“The county board’s debate over a new highway facility was rigorous, and we arrived at a good compromise,” he said. “Process is important, and this example can be a template for future action.”

### **Gary Kutz**

A newcomer to county politics, Gary Kutz has lived his entire life in Jefferson County.

He says growing up on a farm has given him a strong work ethic.

For the past eight years, Kutz has been employed by the Town of Koshkonong in its public works department. He is the town’s only full-time employee.

Prior to that, he was a member and chairperson of the town’s Planning Commission. He said that town board supervisors approached him about a need for snowplow drivers and hired him on a part-time basis as he had his own business.

“I have been in business for myself for over 30 years and, after starting with the township for six months, I was asked to join the Public Works on a full-time basis,” Kutz said. “Having a strong sense of loyalty toward the town and its residents, (I did, as) I felt they deserved better service than they were receiving for their tax dollars.”

Kutz pointed out that during his tenure with the town, the board has authorized purchasing three new plow trucks and a tractor backhoe and many other tools that have made the roadwork more efficient.

“I have enjoyed working closely with the Jefferson County Highway Shop and would like to see all the towns work more closely with the county and make both more efficient,” Kutz said, noting that he would like a chance to share his Koshkonong experience as an illustration of how the county and towns can work closer.

“We all have the same outcome in mind: to get more work done for fewer dollars spent,” Kutz said. “I always try to meet problems head-on without dwelling and wasting time on the same outcome. It would be an honor to be elected to serve on the county board as your District 30 supervisor.”