

EXCLUSIVE: Washington County Fair Buys Insurance From Fair Board President's Firm

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The non-profit organization that runs the Washington County Fair buys its insurance policy from the agency run by the Fair organization's president.

Tracy Oestreich is the owner of T4 Insurance Solutions of West Bend. That company is the vendor that sells liability and other insurance to the Washington County Agricultural and Industrial Society, the organization that puts on the County Fair. Oestreich is the president of that organization's board. In essence, she heads the board of an organization that buys insurance from a company she owns.

Oestreich, in an email, confirmed to me that her company is the Fair's insurance vendor. She denies that this is a conflict of interest and says she recuses herself from voting on any matter dealing with insurance that comes before the board.

I am attempting to learn the cost of the insurance policy, including whatever broker commission Oestreich pockets.

The Agricultural and Industrial Society has canceled this year's fair, a decision that has angered many in Washington County and is raising questions about the finances of the Society and what it does with its taxpayer subsidy. The Society has received \$60,000 from Washington County taxpayers this year and was asked last week to return the money by Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann. It so far hasn't given the money back. Unlike many county fairs, the Washington Fair has a paid staff and its director, Kellie Boone, is apparently still on the payroll even though she has no fair to run this year. Boone says she is also in charge of the expo center at the fairgrounds but it also was closed until earlier this month.

The Agricultural Society has been at odds with the Washington County Board and a County Board member has been asked to leave the Fair Board. The Society is an independent non-profit agency contracted by the county to run the Fair.

The Society has so far refused to comply with my request under the state's open records law to provide information about its staff payroll. The state Supreme Court has ruled, and Attorney General opinions have affirmed, that agencies that contract to do government business are subject to the open records law when they are doing government business.

It is unclear if any other members of the Ag Society Board are profiting off of the Fair that they are running. Over the last 25 years, officials of several Milwaukee County non-profit agencies went to prison for wrongly receiving funds from the agencies they were in charge of.

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