



Never Dream Too Big: A Three-Generation Commitment to Rural Water

Reprinted, with permission, from *North Dakota Water* magazine January 2026.

When University of North Dakota freshman Talli Eaton sat down to write an essay about the water industry, she approached it with a broad perspective. Her paper explored public health, wastewater management, agriculture, environmental protection and the wider economic impacts of stable water systems. What she didn't mention is that rural water isn't just an academic topic for her. It's part of her family's history.

Talli is the great-granddaughter of Leonard "Lenny" Jacobs, one of the early champions of bringing reliable water to southwest North Dakota, and the daughter of Jonathon Eaton, who serves as Vice Chairperson on the Southwest Water Authority (SWA) board. Her three-generation story is about public service and the belief that rural communities deserve the same quality of water as any city.

He Was There From The Very Beginning
The family's story

starts long before Talli was born. As a county commissioner in Adams County, Lenny worked in the 1970s and beyond to bring high-quality water to the region. He believed deeply in what clean water could do for rural communities, and he had evidence to prove it.

"Most people didn't have to grow up with brown water in their house," Jonathon says. "But we did. Grandpa kept a jar of that brown water on his desk when he served in the state legislature."

Lenny understood that improving water quality wasn't just a convenience. For rural residents, it meant safer drinking water, better health outcomes and the potential for growth in farming, business and community life.

"When they started the pipeline, they gave out golden shovels for the first spade of dirt," Jonathon recalls. "I remember Grandpa's shovel sat behind his bedroom door, and as a kid, I'd go in and look at it. When he passed, I got that shovel. It's nothing you can replace."

For Jonathon, the golden shovel represents more than the start of a project. It symbolizes the perseverance required

to, as he put it, "fight for every construction dollar" to make rural water a reality.

Lenny passed away in October 2024, but his words still guide Jonathon's perspective on SWA's work.

"Grandpa would always say, 'You can never dream too big,'" Jonathon says. "That stuck with me."

Stepping Into Big Shoes

By 2008, Lenny was 80 and ready to pass the torch. He asked Jonathon if he would consider running for the SWA board seat he had held for decades.

Jonathon ran, was elected and has served ever since. And just like his grandfather, he quickly realized his role wasn't solely about his own county.

"It's never been just about Adams County," he says. "It's about the whole southwest and really the whole state. Being part of SWA gives you a broader picture. It changes your outlook from 'what benefits my area?' to 'what makes sense for everyone?'"

Just as Lenny had, Jonathon developed his own deep passion for rural water.

A Third Generation

By the time Jonathon joined the board, Talli was just one year old. She grew up with water board meetings woven into the family's schedule and began absorbing bits and pieces—nothing formal, she says, but enough to build a foundation.

"Dad was always willing to talk about what was happening at the meetings and entertain my random questions," she remembers.

Over time, she learned that her great-grandfather had served on the board before her dad. That connection resonated.

"When I found out my great-grandfather held that spot before him, it made their involvement feel bigger," she says. "I feel very proud to be part of a family with multiple generations connected to rural water, especially when I hear the passion they have for what they do."

Talli also noticed the impact their work had on everyday life.

"People my age don't realize how much rural water in North Dakota impacts our lives," she says. "We use water for a multitude of things without much thought."

More Than An Essay

When the opportunity to apply for the North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association scholarship came up, Talli was ready. As a high-achieving student, taking 11 classes during an eight-period school day, she approached the scholarship with determination.

Talli's essay explored the water industry's broad contributions. She chose themes she connected with intellectually rather

than focusing on family history.

"When doing my research, those themes were some of the most common to come up," she says. "Since I didn't know much about the fine details, I stuck with a broader, big-picture idea."

The public health component especially intrigued her.

"She picks things up like a sponge," Jonathon says. "She loves learning and she always works hard at what she's doing."

His Pride Was Clear When She Was Selected

"I was really excited," he says. "It was something I care about more than a lot of other things. It was cool that she won in an area that I find important."

Carrying Forward The Values Of Service

Although Talli is majoring in criminal justice at UND and hopes to become a lawyer, she sees a connection between her studies and the values passed down from her father and great-grandfather.

Her interest in community systems and public service reflects the same work ethic they modeled.

"When it comes to values, both my dad and great-grandfather encouraged having a strong work ethic," Talli explains. "They taught me that when taking on an assignment or task, I should give it my all, because there was no point in not doing my best."

Jonathon sees those qualities in her as well, noting her integrity and dedication to the things she's passionate about.

One story stood out to Talli: her dad joined the SWA board because her great-grandfather asked him to continue the work

he cared so deeply about, and he stayed because he eventually found that same sense of purpose. For Talli, that blend of passion, service and commitment is what she hopes to carry forward.

Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future

From a jar of brown water to a golden shovel to a scholarship essay written decades later, the Eaton-Jacobs family story shows how one project can shape the lives of multiple generations.

Clean, reliable water changed the trajectory of communities across southwest North Dakota. For families like theirs, it changed something else: the belief in what's possible when people "dream big," work together and commit to serving their community.

As Talli begins her college years, she understands the power behind strong public systems. And as Jonathon continues the work his grandfather began, the story of Southwest Water Authority isn't just a chapter in their family history. It's a testament to how vision and persistence can shape a community and the generations who inherit it.



TALLI'S 2025 SENIOR PHOTO

What is Hettinger's greatest business need?

If a business was to come to Hettinger, what should it offer?

- _____
- _____

Share 2 suggestions, cut out and drop in the suggestion box at one of the following businesses?
DFC (Cenex) Maverick's Kennedy's

by end of day on Friday, March 23, 2026.

Thank you for your participation.

All suggestions welcome!

NOTICE OF EQUALIZATION MEETING FOR THE ORGANIZED TOWNSHIPS NAMED BELOW IN ADAMS COUNTY, NORTH DAKOTA

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the following organized township boards of Adams County will meet as individual Boards of Equalization in the Community Room of the Adams County Courthouse for the 2026 assessments at the following times:

Tuesday, April 7 5:00 PM: Chandler Township 7:30 PM: Hettinger Township	Thursday, April 16 5:00 PM: Taylor Butte Township 6:15 PM: Cedar Township 7:30 PM: Bucyrus Township
Thursday, April 9 5:00 PM: Wolf Butte Township 6:15 PM: Maine Township 7:30 PM: Clermont Township	Tuesday, April 21 5:00 PM: Orange Township 6:15 PM: Lightning Creek Township 7:30 PM: Reeder Township
Tuesday, April 14 5:00 PM: Duck Creek Township 6:15 PM: Beisigl Township	Thursday, April 23 5:00 PM: Scott Township 6:15 PM: South Fork Township

Each taxpayer has the right to appear before the Board of Equalization and petition for correction of the taxpayer's assessment. Persons needing special accommodations in order to attend should call the Adams County Auditor at 701-567-4363 at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Katie Roseland
Adams County Director of Tax Equalization 3-12,19

FOR SALE ON BIDS

Adams County is offering the following vehicles and equipment for sale on bids:

- 2001 Dodge 1500 4x4: VIN-1B7HF13Z81J195374
- 2007 Ford F150 4x4: VIN-1FTPW14V67FA25016
- 1995 GMC 1 Ton: VIN-1GDKC34F4SJ521490
- 1999 Dodge 1500 4x4: VIN-1B7HF16Y5XS305738
- 1989 Dodge 1/2 ton 4x4: VIN-9B7HM16Y5K5049812
- 1983 Ford LTL 9000 Semi: VIN-1FDYA90X4DVA44833
- 1996 Ford F700 with Rosco Oil distributor: VIN-1FD-NF70J3TVA13964
- 1994 John Deere 544G Loader with 2 buckets: VIN-544GD545630
- 1985 Chip spreader- model WHS SN 85208
- Homemade Flatbed Utility Trailer
- 11,500-gallon Fuel Tank & pump

Equipment may be viewed at the County shop, please call the County shop at 701-567-2235 with any questions. **Bids will be accepted until Friday April 10th, 2026.** Bids must be in a sealed envelope clearly marked "Bid for Mail or drop sealed bids at the Auditor's Office, 602 Adams Ave. Ste 201, Hettinger ND 58639. Bids must be in a sealed envelope plainly marked: "Bid for (equipment listing description or number as labeled above)" All bids will be opened at the Adams County Courthouse during the April 14, 2026 Commission meeting.

Adams County reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

2-26,3-5,12,19,26