

Borderland BRIEFS

Braunberger, Moe named N.D. County Teachers of the Year

Two local educators were among the 50 teachers recognized as 2026 North Dakota County Teachers of the Year by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Emily Braunberger of Langdon Area Schools was named the Cavalier County Teacher of the Year, while Jeffrey Moe of North Border School District was selected as Pembina County Teacher of the Year. Ashleigh Blikre of Ely Elementary School in Pierce County was also honored. Blikre is formerly of Langdon. According to the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the educators were selected for their outstanding contributions to education and their school communities. The teachers will be recognized during a special event June 23 at the North Dakota State Capitol in Bismarck. North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction Levi Bachmeier congratulated the educators as part of the statewide announcement.

Fordville man sentenced in fatal DUI crash case

Travis Dean Bell was sentenced Monday in Northeast Central District Court in Grand Forks for a 2024 crash that seriously injured Nicole Louthain and killed her 6-year-old daughter, Katarina Louthain. Bell, who previously pleaded guilty to criminal vehicular injury and criminal vehicular homicide as part of a plea agreement, received the maximum sentence allowed under that agreement from Judge Theodore Sandberg. Bell was sentenced to five years for criminal vehicular injury and six years for criminal vehicular homicide, with the sentences to run concurrently. He was also sentenced to three years of supervised probation and participation in the 24/7 sobriety program. Bell was taken into custody immediately following the hearing. The charges stemmed from a June 3, 2024, crash at the intersection of Highway 2 and Airport Road in Grand Forks. Prosecutors said Bell, who was intoxicated, rear-ended the vehicle occupied by Nicole and Katarina Louthain while it was stopped at a traffic light. During Monday's nearly three-hour sentencing hearing, both Nicole and Robert Louthain delivered emotional victim impact statements while holding an urn containing their daughter's ashes. Nicole Louthain told the court, "The loss of Katarina will forever keep me broken." Bell also addressed the court, apologizing for his actions and stating, "I am not a monster." Before sentencing, Sandberg criticized Bell for what he described as a lack of honesty regarding his alcohol consumption prior to the crash and said the sentence was intended to serve as a deterrent to impaired driving. "The reason for DUI laws is this case," Sandberg told the court.

Tai Ji Quan classes offered in Cavalier

The NDSU Extension Pembina County will offer free Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance classes this summer at the Cavalier City Park tennis court. The program is designed to help older adults improve balance, strength and mobility while reducing the risk of falls. Classes will be held from 1-2 p.m. throughout June, July and August. Registration is required. For more information or to register, call 701-265-8411 or email NDSU.Pembina.Extension@ndsu.edu.

Langdon Area Baseball seeks concession stand volunteers

The Langdon Area Baseball program is asking local businesses and community members to volunteer for concession stand shifts during the upcoming baseball and softball season. Organizers say the effort would help give families involved in the program a break while encouraging community involvement and support for local athletes. Those interested in volunteering are encouraged to contact Emily Schaefer at 218-259-6713.

Bathgate photographer featured in 2027 North Dakota calendar

Photographs by Bathgate photographer Ryan Houston are featured in the newly released 2027 North Dakota scenic calendar published by North Dakota Magazine. Houston's featured images, "Harvest Storm" and "Golden Road," were both taken in Pembina County. The annual calendar highlights scenic photography from across North Dakota and includes work from photographers throughout the region and surrounding states. According to North Dakota Magazine co-editor Annie Bennett, the calendar helps showcase the beauty of North Dakota to people across the country and around the world. The 2027 calendar is available online and at select North Dakota retail locations for \$16.95.

Drayton man pleads not guilty in Pembina County pursuit case

The defense for 57-year-old Shawn Kenneth Bjerke entered not guilty pleas this week on behalf of their client in Pembina County District Court. Bjerke was arrested April 7 in Pembina County after allegedly fleeing from law enforcement in a stolen truck before driving the vehicle into a field, where it became immobilized. Authorities also allege narcotics and drug paraphernalia were discovered inside the vehicle. Bjerke is facing seven criminal charges in the case, including three drug possession charges, possession of drug paraphernalia, fleeing from law enforcement, theft, and driving under suspension. A preliminary hearing previously scheduled for June has been waived. Bjerke's next court appearance is scheduled for August. He is also facing separate theft and burglary charges in Walsh County.

Free summer lunch program to begin in Cavalier

Cavalier Assembly of God, in partnership with Pembina County Backpack Program, will begin offering a free summer lunch program for children in the community later this month. The program will run Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from May 25 through July 31. There is no cost to participate and all children are welcome. Organizers ask families to complete an online signup form to help ensure enough meals are prepared. A link to the form is available on the QL page.

North Dakota monitoring possible hantavirus exposure cases

North Dakota health officials say they are monitoring several residents who may have been exposed to the Andes hantavirus. According to officials, the individuals were exposed to a passenger aboard the MV Hondius. Health officials continue to stress that the overall risk to the public remains very low. The Andes hantavirus is a rare virus most commonly found in South America and can cause severe respiratory illness in some cases.

Borderland News Center staff contributed to this report

Experience summer at the Capitol with outdoor tours and expanded indoor tour days

BISMARCK, N.D. – The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) welcomes visitors to experience the unique architecture and scenic grounds of the North Dakota State Capitol this summer, as monthly outdoor tours kick off and Saturday tours resume.

"To help showcase our state's unique history and the beauty of the Capitol grounds, we're expanding our indoor tour schedule and launching a monthly outdoor tour," said OMB Facilities Management Director Brandon Solberg. "Summer is a fantastic time to visit the Capitol, and this year we're especially excited to welcome even more guests as North Dakota becomes a destination for additional visitors attending the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library's grand opening in July."

Guided outdoor tours will take place at 6 p.m. on June 8, July 13 and Aug. 10. These tours will highlight the history of the buildings and grounds,

Capitol monuments and the arboretum trail. Each tour covers about one mile and lasts one hour. Scooters and wheelchairs are welcome. Attendees should gather outside the Capitol's south/visitor entrance at 600 East Boulevard Ave., with visitor parking available to the east.

Starting the week of May 25, guided indoor tours will be more widely available through Sept. 1 on the following schedule:

- Monday through Friday: 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 2 p.m., 3 p.m.
- Saturdays: noon, 1 p.m., 2 p.m.
- Holidays (Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day): noon, 1 p.m., 2 p.m.

Special group tours can also be arranged by completing the tour request form on OMB's website. Please note that self-guided tours are not permitted on weekends or holidays. Year-round virtual tours of the Capitol are also available on OMB's website.

Free school meals measure in North Dakota approved for November vote

By: Jeff Beach, North Dakota Monitor

North Dakotans will vote in November on a mandate that the state must pay for meals for K-12 students.

The North Dakota Secretary of State's Office announced Thursday it has approved a sufficient number of signatures submitted by the Together for School Meals coalition to place the initiated measure on the Nov. 3 ballot. It will be listed as Measure 3.

"This is a huge milestone," Robin Nelson, chair of Together for School Meals, said in a news release. "North Dakotans from every corner of the state worked to place this on the ballot because this issue is real, it is urgent, and it is deeply connected to the future we want for our children."

If the measure passes, public schools would start providing free breakfast and lunch during the 2027-28 school year.

The measure would change the state constitution to dictate that earnings from North Dakota's Legacy Fund be used to pay for breakfast and lunch at school unless the Legislature identifies another funding source. A portion of the state's oil and gas taxes were used to create the Legacy Fund.

The federal government has a free and reduced-cost meal program, which will defray some of the cost. The Legislature has provided money to pay for school meals for some families not eligible for the federal program, but has stopped short of funding meals for all students.

More than 47,000 K-12 students in North Dakota receive free or reduced meals though the National



Members of the sponsoring committee for a proposed ballot measure to make public school meals free watch as staff with the North Dakota Secretary of State's Office count petition signatures on April 9, 2026. (Photo by Mary Steurer/North Dakota Monitor)

School Lunch Program, according to data from the Department of Public Instruction. About 3,000 of those students are subsidized by state money under an expansion of the program adopted by the Legislature.

The measure applies to public schools but says nonpublic schools, Bureau of Indian Education schools and other tribal schools are eligible to participate.

The state Department of Public Instruction has estimated that the program would cost about \$133 million for the 2027-2029 state budget cycle. The actual cost will depend on how many students eat at the school and how many families sign up for the fed-

eral program.

The Secretary of State's Office said 49,338 petition signatures were accepted, 18,174 signatures more than the 31,164 needed to get the measure on the ballot.

There were 57,419 signatures submitted on April 9 with 8,081 signatures rejected because of incorrect or insufficient information.

Polls have shown broad support for free school meals.

Reach North Dakota Monitor deputy editor Jeff Beach at jbeach@northdakotamonitor.com

North Dakota voters to decide constitutional measures in 2026

By Borderland Press Staff

Constitutional Measure 1

This measure would require constitutional amendments — whether proposed by citizens or lawmakers — to address only a single subject. Supporters say it would make ballot measures easier to understand and prevent unrelated topics from being bundled together.

November 2026 General Election Constitutional Measure 1

This measure would change legis-

lative term limit rules approved by voters in 2022. It would remove the current prohibition preventing lawmakers from proposing constitutional amendments related to legislative term limits.

Constitutional Measure 2

This measure would raise the approval threshold for constitutional amendments from a simple majority to 60 percent. If approved, future constitutional amendments proposed either

by citizens or the Legislature would need 60 percent voter approval to pass.

The North Dakota Secretary of State ballot measures page posts official ballot language, analyses, and fiscal information as it becomes available. Information sources from the North Dakota Secretary of State website: <https://www.sos.nd.gov/elections/voter/ballot-measures/measures-ballot>

HHS expands access to Parent-Child Interaction Therapy through telehealth

North Dakota Health and Human Services (HHS) FamilyFirst Services now offers Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) through telehealth by an approved provider to eligible families. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is an evidence-based program for children ages 2 to 7 and their parents or caregivers. It is designed to improve child behavior, strengthen parenting skills and build healthier parent-child relationships.

Previously, PCIT was limited to in-person sessions. The change, which took effect on May 1, expands access for children and families receiving support through FamilyFirst Services.

"This change expands our ability to provide accessible, evidence-based support to families who may face barriers to in-person services, especially those in rural areas," said Chelsea Flory, director of Children and Family Services. "Telehealth delivery maintains the integrity of the PCIT model while increasing flexibility and reach." FamilyFirst Services, previously known as Title IV-E Prevention Services are designed to strengthen families and help children and youth remain safely at home. Currently, there are eight different services that are federally funded through Title IV-E located across the state. Services provide practical parenting support and can help address behavioral health needs.

Eligible children and their caregivers can receive FamilyFirst Services at no cost. To apply for eligibility, visit www.hhs.nd.gov/familyfirst. Parents and caregivers, public and private agencies, treatment providers, tribal social services, juvenile courts and others can complete and submit an application on behalf of a child with legal guardian approval.

For more information about applications, approved providers or other questions, email titleiveprevention@nd.gov.

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The BORDERLAND PRESS

The Borderland Press is published weekly by The Borderland Press Inc., 1403 Third Street, Langdon, ND 58249. Periodicals postage paid at Langdon, N.D.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Borderland Press, P.O. Box 230, Langdon, ND 58249

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The official newspaper of the Langdon Area School District, Munich Public School District, North Border School District, and St. Alphonsus School.

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