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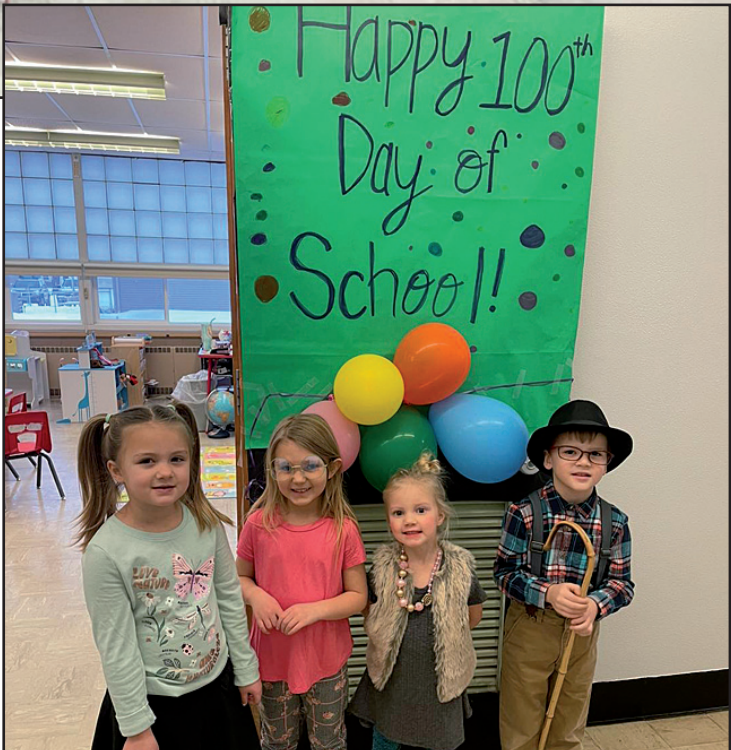
Thursday, February 1, 2024



Celebrating 100 days of school

The students at Lakota Elementary recently celebrated the 100th day of school. Pictured right are the pre-K students and above the elementary students make a giant "100."

Photos from Facebook



Extreme cold exposes gaps facing homeless population

Better coordination, more funding needed, providers say

BY MICHAEL STANDAERT
ND News Cooperative

Missing a bus would be an inconvenience for most people. For Raymond Mallard, a 53-year-old homeless man, it was fatal. He appears to have missed a bus back to Bismarck from Mandan and died from exposure on the coldest night of the year.

Sometime on the evening of January 13 on into the morning, as temperatures dropped to -21 with a windchill in the -60s, Mallard succumbed outside Wildwood Mobile Home Park.

"He was visiting one of his friends and he was coming back that night. He was walking here," said his relative Lisa Ireland during an interview at the homeless shelter Ministry on the Margins in Bismarck. "He just missed the bus."

Ireland herself has been homeless for nearly a year. She and others at the shelter are among some 2,500 homeless people in the state, according to the most recent data from the ND Homeless Management Information system.

Discussions with homeless people and those who provide food, shelter and care for them paint a picture of haphazard municipal management, a lack of overall funding, and little direction from the state.

Those gaps literally leave many out in extreme conditions like those that hit the state in early and mid-January.

There is no low-barrier shelter in Bismarck during daytime hours, leaving homeless who suffer from active addiction no choice but to get out of the cold at a public library or business places. There aren't any shelters across the river in Mandan for those in Mallard's condition, either.

"This winter is probably one of the hardest winters I've been through," said Robin Martin, who stays at Ministry on the Margins in the evening. Originally from North Dakota, he previously wintered in Rapid City, SD after becoming homeless. "It's cold out there."

Martin said there's need in Bismarck for at least an emergency warming shelter in the daytime during cold weather, if



Members of the homeless community sheltering from the cold in Bismarck use computers at Missouri Slope Areawide United Way's Center for Opportunity. Photo by Michael Standaert.

not another shelter. The public library, hospitals or other businesses aren't a good solution, because the homeless are usually forced out, he said.

"If you find a place to warm up at, they kick you out right away," Martin said.

After discussions among the Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless People, Ministry on the Margins (MoM) decided to open earlier during the latest extreme cold period and unlocked its doors at 5 p.m. instead of the usual 10 p.m.

The high-barrier shelter run by Missouri Slope Areawide United Way provided space for anyone homeless during the daytime in the extreme cold period. High-barrier facilities have daily breathalyzer and drug testing to ensure clients are clean while low-barrier centers do not.

Those not staying the night had to trek the mile-and-a-half to Ministry on the Margins twice per day during extreme cold, or shelter where they could. Back in mid-December in Bismarck, a homeless woman also died of exposure, while another, known to be struggling with addiction, was killed by a train strike later that month.

Sr. Kathleen Atkinson, who runs MoM, said that while there's emergency response during floods and other events,

there is a lack of government coordination about cold weather. During the extreme cold, the shelter housed 45 to 55 people per night, she said.

"These would be those who are in active addiction, or have a mental health issue," Atkinson said. "They would be among the three people that died, so far."

Atkinson said there is state and municipal money to fund shelters like hers, but she sees a bigger issue at play.

"There's not a united vision or a moral, strategic, collaborative leadership," she said.

Over at the United Way shelter, homeless crowded in where they could during the day. It was an "unplanned plan," according to executive director Jena Gullo, and a repeat of last winter.

"We're taking people from Ministry on the Margins during the daytime because we don't want them to die, outside," Gullo said. "And they will certainly die outside. The unfortunate thing is that it was cold weeks ago, and just because it wasn't sub-zero, it was too cold for people to be outside."

Gullo said the coalition has been providing for "unmet needs," but ultimately United Way doesn't have the funding to sustain long-term assistance for those who fall through those gaps.

"If we would have said no,

what would have happened?" said Gullo, referencing the decision to open the doors to all homeless during the daytime in recent weeks.

Brighter spots

Elsewhere, communities and community leaders have stepped up to fill local gaps during emergency situations.

In Fargo, a winter warming center at the Downtown Engagement Center is available to protect some among the state's largest homeless population of 1,000 people, a number that includes the southeast region.

"Knowing that the rates of homelessness were trending upward, we wanted to make sure that there was an additional place that people were able to access to get out of the elements," said Chandler Esslinger, who works with the harm reduction program at Fargo Cass Public Health.

"It's not a traditional shelter setting, but it is a place intended to provide respite and get people out of the elements to ensure that there's no adverse health effects, injury due to cold weather or cold weather-related deaths," she said.

Esslinger said the city certainly learned a lot that it is willing to share as a possible template for other municipalities across the state.

"We've identified a population that needs to be served in this way, folks that don't fit with other area shelters that specialize in families, single adult men, or veterans," she said. "We're really working to ensure that those folks who maybe fall through the cracks of that system still have a place to be and I do think that's a conversation that can be had across the state."

Sherry Adams, Southwestern District Health Unit administrator in Dickinson, said local police recognized an emergency due to the severe cold and called her on January 10 to spearhead a response.

That response included reopening a facility that had previously been used for the COVID emergency. Initially, 10 cots

(Continued on Page 14)

Lakota Cloverleaves 4-H Club news

BY MARGARET ESTVOLD
4-H club leader

On January 21, after our tour of CHS-Lakota, Siena Dahl called the Lakota Cloverleaves 4-H Club meeting to order. Pledges were said. Roll call was: What activity do you like to do in the snow? Secretary and treasurer reports were given.

Old business: Animal project books were discussed and encouraged to be completed for next year's fair. Brenda delivered Angel Tree gifts to Nelson County Social Services. Project books will be discussed at the Nelson County 4-H Council meeting in January. Brenda delivered the ornaments for the Good Samaritan Home and Prairie Rose; each resident received an ornament. Those who attended Nelson County Project Day shared their favorite project they took home.

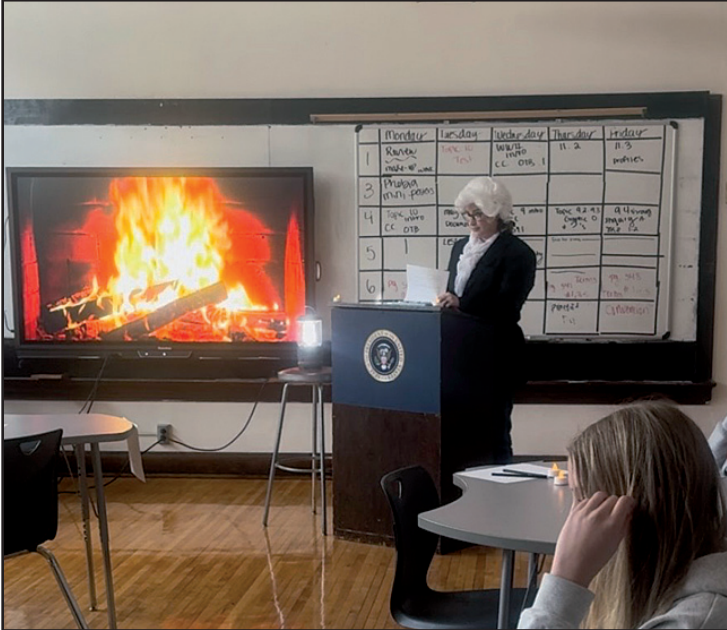
New business: Nelson County Crop Judging Team has been established. Laura and Levi



Leah Pedersen did a demonstration on how to do CPR.

Steffan have volunteered to be on the team. We toured the CHS-Lakota facility and shared

(Continued on Page 14)



Constitutional Convention

The Lakota 7th grade US history class held their mock Constitutional Convention on January 19 and did an excellent job. Each student took on the role of a Founding Father to discuss plans for deciding representation, the 3/5ths Compromise and the addition of a Bill of Rights to the Constitution. George Washington even made an appearance.

Photos from Facebook



Congratulations Zach!

Senior Zach Gibson reached 1000 career points during the boys basketball game against Drayton/Valley-Edinburg on Thursday, January 25. For more scores and photos, turn to Page 10.

Photo from Facebook