

Hi, hello and welcome to our new subscriber of the week:

Debra Wilson  
Tallahassee, FL

Your Weather



Friday - July 4  
90 / 74



Saturday - July 5  
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Sunday - July 6  
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Operation Dry Water

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will participate in Operation Dry Water as part of a nationally coordinated effort to increase knowledge about the dangers of boating under the influence. The goal is to reduce the number of accidents and deaths associated with alcohol and drug use on state waterways.

ODW weekend, July 4-6, is the national weekend of heightened enforcement directed at boating under the influence laws and recreational boater outreach.

While educating boaters about the hazards associated with boating while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a year-round effort, on ODW weekend the Game and Fish Department's game wardens focus on the water, informing boaters about safe boating practices, and removing impaired operators from the water.

Tips for staying safe on the water:

**Boat sober** – Alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in recreational boater deaths. Alcohol and drug use impair a boater's judgment, balance, vision and reaction time.

**Wear your life jacket** – 85% of drowning victims nationwide were not wearing a life jacket.

**Take the online boating safety education course** – 71% of deaths nationwide occurred on boats where the operator had not received boating safety instruction.

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**"We on this continent should never forget that men first crossed the Atlantic not to find soil for their plows but to secure liberty for their souls."**  
**- Robert J. McCracken**  
**Happy 4th of July**

Make the Red River Valley unforgettable one destination at a time

By Andrea Johnston

The Destination Development Grant Program provides financial support for the development or expansion of tourism experiences and attractions that contribute to North Dakota's economic growth and diversification. This is an opportunity to grow and highlight our portion of the state and nearly \$5-million was spent in our region in 2023.

The program is designed to:

- Increase the number of unique visitor experiences
- Support workforce recruitment and retention

'GRANT' CON'T PAGE 2

Strength and courage

Area youth receives scholarship to continue passion for horses

*This is the second in a series of stories about students doing unique and exceptional things.*



Sophia Wilson, competing in goat tying at the Wojo Rodeo in Middle River. Submitted photo



Sophia Wilson, posed with her beloved horse, Chica for her senior pictures. Submitted photo

Strength comes in all shapes and sizes. For one area youth, it has been a characteristic from a very young age and now will be a useful trait to possess as she moves into the next stage of her life where she hopes to continue a lifelong passion.

Sophia Wilson, daughter of Dusty and Des Wilson of Joliette, ND, was on a horse with her mom for the first time when she was six months old. When she was two years old she was lead line barrel racing. Her sister would lead the horse. At the young age of four years old she started riding horse on her own and she said that is when her passion for horses took off.

Her father Dusty said when she was in first and second grade, a teacher at Drayton Public School Linda Merrill told them Sophia doesn't run, she trots because that is what she would do in physical education class.

"She has been around horses her entire life," Dusty said. "I believe it's taught her a strong work ethic. "Whether it was cleaning stalls, throwing hay bails, running the combine or rotobooter, she works hard and always has a smile on her face."

Sophia won her first pee wee buckle when she was five years old at a Devils Lake rodeo and her first youth and open barrel racing buckle in 2014 when she was just seven years old. She started goat tying when she was nine.

"Mom, dad, and I took off around to different rodeos in North Dakota," Sophia said. "We went to Fort Worth, Texas, for the Junior Patriot Rodeo in 2018."

She took a few years off before starting with the North Dakota

Junior High Rodeo Association through school at the end of her seventh grade. In eighth grade, Sophia started roping competitively and made the state finals that year in barrel racing and tying.

As a freshman, she started in high school roping, barrel racing, and goat tying. She made the state finals in 2022. She then moved over to the Minnesota High School rodeo her junior year and started team roping as well. This is when one person ropes the horns of a steer and another the back feet. Sophia competed as a heeler, the person who ropes the feet.

"At the end of junior year, I made state finals in all my events - roping, team roping, barrel racing, and goat tying," Sophia said.

During the 2024-25 school year, Sophia made the Minnesota Rodeo state finals in barrel racing, break away, and team roping.

In 2021, Sophia was the Wojo Rodeo junior barrel racing

champion and in 2023 was the Wojo Rodeo goat tying champion.

She just turned 18-years-old and will be heading to Garden City, Kansas, in August to continue her education in business administration at Garden City Community College. She will be a member of the Broncbuster Rodeo Team and will compete in barrel racing, break away, and team roping. She was lucky enough to get offered a scholarship there which she applied for online. She then had an interview with the coach. She applied to a couple different schools but this seemed the best fit for her.

Sophia will be able to bring her horses with her to school in August as they have a facility there to keep her horses on campus. She will be bringing her barrel horse Lola, her break away and team roping horse Chica, her head horse Buggz, and one she will be training on break away this summer named Steele.

"It definitely helps to feel more at home when my horses can come with me," Sophia said.

'STUDENT SERIES' CON'T PAGE 8

Trailer homes destroyed in early morning blaze

By Mike Alan Steinfeldt

fire department personnel arrived.

One trailer home was completely destroyed and another was most likely severely damaged as the result of a fire early in the morning on Thursday June 24, in Grafton.

According to Grafton Volunteer Fire Department Chief Ken Popiel, the call came in at 3:07 am.

He said the trailer home at 104 Oak Drive was completely involved when

"We had to knock the flames down right away when we got there," Popiel said. "The fire heavily damage the first trailer and the heat damaged the second trailer too."

Popiel said 12 members of the fire department responded to the blaze. With two trailers involved he called the Park River Fire

'FIRE' CON'T PAGE 2



Sophia Wilson competing in breakaway roping at the Wojo Rodeo in Manohmen. Submitted photo