

First-day support system



The Trautmann family walk Annabelle, center, to her first day of kindergarten Thursday at Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Elementary on Main Street in Dilworth.

Anna Paige / The Forum

Ham and greens

Great Plains Food Bank receives 35,000 pounds of ham, monetary donation from Hornbacher's

BY HUNTER SCHWARTZ
WDAY

FARGO — The Great Plains Food Bank received two major donations on Thursday, Sept. 4, including 35,000 pounds of ham and a check from Hornbacher's.

The North Dakota Farmers Union and Farmers Union Enterprises donated hundreds of boxes, each containing 15- to 20-pound hams. The pork came from Redwood Farms in Estherville, Iowa, and from hogs described as unusual sizes.

An official with the Great Plains Food Bank said protein is one of the

most sought-after items across its charitable food network.

"This product is going to be on the tables of families who are needing it within the week. So substantial contribution, incredible partnership with North Dakota Farmers Union. We are so very grateful," said Marcia Paulson, chief development officer for the Great Plains Food Bank.

The donation is the second of five planned stops for the group. The next delivery will be in Brooklyn Park, Minn.

As part of its annual Checkout Hunger campaign, Hornbacher's donated \$46,969.81 to



Chris Flynn / The Forum

J.J. Walsh, pictured, and Ryan Fischer help unload pallets of ham on Thursday at the Great Plains Food Bank in north Fargo that is donated by the North Dakota Farmers Union/Farmers Union Enterprises.

Great Plains Food Bank on Thursday. The latest Checkout Hunger campaign ran for four weeks in July at all eight Hornbacher's locations in

Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo.

Reach WDAY reporter Hunter Schwartz at hschwartz@wday.com.



Chris Flynn / The Forum

S.G. Reinertsen Elementary School Principal Tiffany Nagel greets students as they arrive for the first day of school Tuesday in south Moorhead.

Moorhead Area Public Schools welcomes nearly 7,400 students

BY ROBIN HUEBNER
The Forum

MOORHEAD — Moorhead Area Public Schools welcomed fewer students this school year than last, but enrollment appears steady looking at the last five academic years.

The school district reported 7,378 students in grades K–12 on Tuesday, Sept. 2, the first day of the 2025–26 school year

That is 88 fewer students than on the first day of school last fall, the district said in a news release, and the numbers do not include preschool students.

The district's largest class is in grade 12, with 613 students, while 512 students make up the new kindergarten class.

For comparison, opening enrollment totaled 7,466 in the fall of 2024; 7,348 in fall of 2023; 7,427 in fall of 2022; 7,336 in fall of 2021; 7,153 in fall of 2020; and 7,087 in fall of 2019.

Superintendent Brandon Lunak said this year's school theme, Foundations for the Future, reflects on learning opportunities in Moorhead classrooms and progress made in

supporting students. "Our students truly are the foundation for Moorhead's future," Lunak said in the release.

The Moorhead High School Phase 2 construction project is finished, including a new main entrance, administration areas, science classrooms and a parking lot on the school's south side.

Additional music and fine arts classrooms will open over winter break and a new theater is scheduled to be finished at the end of this school year.

Phase 1 of the high school opened to students in January 2024.

The district is seeking approval of a two-question operating levy and capital projects levy referendum on Nov. 4, 2025.

Unlike a bond referendum passed in 2019, used solely for building projects, this year's referendum is focused on students and learning, the district said.

More information on the upcoming referendum can be found at vote152.org.

Reach Forum reporter Robin Huebner at rhuebner@forumcomm.com.

12 hot air balloon pilots to return to Medora for annual rally

STAFF REPORTS

MEDORA, N.D. — "Fall colors" takes on a new meaning each autumn as bright balloons take to the skies over the Badlands.

The Medora Balloon Rally returns for its 23rd year this weekend, Sept. 6-7. Twelve pilots from across the United States will be convening in Medora to launch their hot air balloons during the event. All pilots have flown in the Badlands before, and each is excited to return for another year of fun.

Some of the pilots have been flying in the Badlands since the beginning of the Balloon Rally, including Tommy Tollefson and John Boulger, the balloon captain. Tollefson has warm memories of piloting in the Badlands during those early years.

"In the mid-1980s, we made the first balloon



Contributed / Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation

Hot air balloon pilots prepare for takeoff over the Badlands during the 2024 annual Medora Balloon Rally.

flight across Theodore Roosevelt National Park," he reminisced. "That first flight in Medora inspired Harold Schafer to invite us to an overnight and fly in Medora. I had the pleasure of taking Harold for his last balloon flight. We flew east from the Badlands Motel, south of the interstate, where he told

me he used to ride horses when he first arrived. The Medora Balloon Rally blossomed from those early flights, when Randy [Hatzenbuehler] asked if we could make it an official yearly event. We did!"

This long-running tradition is the reason so many guests look forward



Contributed / Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation.

Hot air balloons rise over the Badlands during the 2024 annual Medora Balloon Rally.

to an early wake-up call every year. The balloons are set to launch at 6:30 from the entrance of the

Medora Campground, soaring up and above to wherever the wind takes them.

Due to parking limitations near the launch site, the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation is asking guests to park at one of two locations: the parking lot near the Medora Musical Amphitheatre Welcome Center or at Chimney Park.

There will be shuttles to and from the Medora Musical Welcome Center that will drop off guests near the balloon launch site for \$5 cash. The shuttles will run throughout the morning.

Breakfast sandwiches, coffee and other beverages will be available for purchase near the launch sites, and breakfast will be available starting at 6 a.m. at Sheriff Bear's Burgers and Theodore's Dining Room.

For weather updates, itineraries, and to sign up for SMS notifications, visit medora.com/hotairballoon.

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