

Bakken Briefs

Crosby eateries see change

Amid the instability of dining options in Crosby in the last few months, several places remain for a quick lunch or a sit-down dinner, and some of them have expanded their hours or offerings.

The Bypass Bar and Grill closed in December as the building owners seek a new operator for the business, and Crosby Self Serve has been reduced to a sporadic menu and hours.

As a result, some of the other food establishments in Crosby have noticed an increase in business over the past few months.

"We are extremely busy," said Morgan Ames, owner of 17 N. Main Bistro.

The Bistro is staying open later on Mondays to offer a dinner special; the Crosby Moose Lodge recently added Sunday breakfasts; and The Depot has added grab-and-go lunch specials.

--The Journal, Crosby

Burke donates to Philippines

Burke Central High School's Future Business Leaders of America chapter had a much different outcome with its annual rummage sale this year, adviser Julie Termine said.

Among the items for sale was a tote of basketball uniforms from the school's former co-op with Bowbells. Ma Rilou Vasquez, Crosby, a native of the Philippines, saw it and wished she could buy them all for a school in her homeland.

The cost estimate to ship them there came in at \$600, but Termine and Vasquez applied for charitable gaming funds from Rosie's Cantina in Portal and were awarded even more: \$1,000.

With the additional \$400, Vasquez's sister in the Philippines purchased buckets of bread for families in that area who were affected by a typhoon that left them without their grain supply.

--Burke County Tribune, Bowbells

Williston awaits Target store

A Target store is coming to Williston, the city's economic development office announced.

Target Corp. has selected Williston Square as the site for a more than 134,000-square-foot store, its first in western North Dakota.

City and departmental leadership said they value their relationship with Target Corp. and look forward to welcoming Target to Williston.

"I'm proud of the Williston team that positioned our city to be able to secure a commitment from a major retailer that will improve our economy and provide the services that our citizens deserve," Mayor Howard Klug said.

The store will be located at 3022 Dakota Drive inside Williston Square, sitting just west of the development's existing tenants: Slim Chickens, Genesis, Taco Bell and 7 Brew Coffee.

--Williston Herald

Minot at odds on city pound

A Minot City Council decision Jan. 23 to reject a negotiated pound contract with Souris Valley Animal Shelter leaves stray animals out in the cold, but Minot Police Chief Michael Frye stressed he will not put any animals in jeopardy.

The city's one-year pound contract for 2025 with SVAS has expired, and SVAS had been the only respondent to the city's request for proposals to provide pound services for 2026.

The city directed staff to negotiate after an SVAS-proposed three-year contract, to allow it to securely put services in place, became hung up.

But the council voted 4-3 against a negotiated two-year contract that didn't give the city the voting position on SVAS' board that it wanted and didn't provide for release of all the financial information requested by some on the council.

--Minot Daily News

Watford wants quality of life

For years, the conversation in Watford City has centered on "essential" growth: housing, infrastructure, and oil field services. But as the calendar turns to 2026, the local dialogue has shifted toward the "quality of life" amenities that make a town feel like a permanent home.

A survey of 50 area residents revealed a community hungry for more than just another restaurant. When asked what they would like to see come to Watford City that isn't here now, the answers painted a clear picture of a town looking for places to gather, play, and shop.

Over 50% of respondents asked for recreational entertainment such as a bowling alley, arcade or family fun center. Coming in a strong second was the desire for major national retailers such as Costco, Walmart and Target.

--McKenzie County Farmer, Watford City

Killdeer grocery store saved

The Killdeer community has been rescued from becoming another "food desert" statistic in the state thanks to an agreement struck between the city and a Beulah business that will save the one and only grocery store in town.

Bronson's Marketplace, Beulah, on Jan. 22 officially took over Hinrich's SuperValu grocery store at 150 Central Ave. S. in Killdeer, according to Logan Kessler, owner of Bronson's.

Bronson's has been a grocery store in Beulah for more than 50 years and has a second location in Bowman, which was established six years ago.

Bronson's will receive loans of \$5 million from the Dunn County Job Development Authority and \$4 million from the city of Killdeer toward finding a new location for the store and constructing a new 20,000-square-foot building.

--Beulah Beacon

Armstrong Rolls Out Program To Improve Soil Health And Wildlife Habitat

Governor Kelly Armstrong rolled out the Governor's Legacy Soil Health and Habitat Program, a cooperative effort to improve soil health and wildlife habitat on marginally productive cropland across North Dakota's rural landscape.

Joining Armstrong at a Capitol press conference to unveil the program were state Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring, Game and Fish Director Jeb Williams and North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts Executive Director Rhonda Kelsch, along with roughly fifty partners and supporters of the pilot project.

The goal of the voluntary working lands program is to help North Dakota farmers strengthen cropland productivity and resilience with perennial grass cover, while improving soil health and water retention and creating much-needed wildlife habitat and access for hunters.

The Game and Fish Department partnered with the Association of Soil Conservation Districts to secure \$4.3 million from the state's Outdoor Heritage Fund, along with \$2.2 million in matching contributions from partners, for the two-year, \$6.5 million pilot project.

"This joint effort will help preserve and promote our rich heritage of farming and hunting for generations to come, while also showcasing the spirit of cooperation that makes North Dakota special," Armstrong said. "Healthy soils and wildlife habitat are essential to our strong economy and the unmatched quality of life that makes North Dakota the best place to live, work and raise a family. We appreciate the ag, conservation, hunting and energy stakeholders who worked with Game and Fish and the soil conservation districts to make this program possible with Outdoor Heritage Fund support."

"This gives us the ability to look at planting some perennial grasses in a short period, I love that flexibility about it," Goehring said, adding, "There's a lot of value in this. ...It's going to do more to change the landscape and help landowners and sportsmen out there."

Williams said the additional grassland will provide much-needed cover for deer and grassland birds. Access is not a requirement of the program, but producers can elect to receive additional incentives for access if they enroll in the state's existing Private Lands Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program. The program could be used to enhance habitat on existing PLOTS land, Williams said, noting the program has received input and broad support from ag, conservation and energy partners.

"This program is designed to be simple, locally led and producer-friendly," Williams said. "Our goal is to create a soil health and habitat program with strong support from all partners to build a lasting legacy of healthy soils, thriving habitats and resilient communities."

The Association of Soil Conservation Districts will administer the program, with local delivery through soil conservation districts and partners.

"This working lands program will encompass environmental stewardship, an economic return on investment, and increased development of wildlife habitat. Through these tools we will continue to build upon a legacy North Dakota can be proud of," Kelsch said.

The pilot program will cover approximately 10,000 acres, with the goal of eventually seeking dedicated funding to execute the program on a larger scale. All types of cropland are eligible for the program, which offers annual payments on five-year agreements for producers to establish perennial grasses. Producers are also eligible to receive a crop insurance premium reduction in coordination with USDA's Risk Management Agency, on acres seeded to perennial grasses.

The "Legacy" title of the program is an acronym for Land stewardship, Ecology and energy, Growth and governance, Agriculture and access, Conservation and collaboration, and Yield and your future.

Landowners interested in this effort to improve soil health and wildlife habitat can contact their local soil conservation district at NDASCD.com. Enrollment begins February 2.

The Outdoor Heritage Fund was created during the 2013 legislative session and receives a portion of the state's oil and gas gross production tax. The Outdoor Heritage Fund Advisory Board recommended approval of the program to the North Dakota Industrial Commission, which approved the program on December 17.

Memorials Received By Mountrail Bethel Home

Donations received from Knife River Lutheran Church, Holy Cross Lutheran Church of Powers Lake, Zion Lutheran Church of Berthold, Ray Women of the ELCA, and Mountrail Williams Electric Cooperative. Also, Bethel Home received a donation from Marie Harstad for Rosen Place.

Memorials and donations are always appreciated and may be mailed to Mountrail Bethel Home at P.O. Box 700, Stanley, ND 58784.

Memorials Received By Mountrail Community Food Pantry

The Mountrail Community Food Pantry received an anonymous donation in memory of Ralph Nordquist. The Food Pantry also received donations in memory of Roger Evans from Barbara Jones, and Cheryl and Fritz Weisenberger.

Donations are very appreciated and may be mailed to 6989 84th Ave NW, Stanley, ND 58784.

Legislative News

From State Senator Mark Enget

I believe deeply that no child in North Dakota should ever go hungry at school. That is not the debate. We have a moral obligation to feed all our children, and I contend that we meet that obligation today.

That's why I voted no on Bill 1624.

Under current law, no student is denied a meal, period. Families earning up to 225 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and even if a family hasn't signed up or an account has a zero balance, the student is still fed. That policy has been in state law since 2023. The idea that children are being turned away hungry simply isn't true.

Bill 1624 goes far beyond fixing a problem that already has a solution. It would require the state to pay for breakfast and lunch for every K-12 student, regardless of need, at an estimated cost of \$150 million per biennium. That cost is certain to grow over time.

At the same time, we're facing a projected budget shortfall of up to \$1.5 billion in the coming years. More than half of our state budget is funded by extraction and production taxes, and anyone who lives here knows how unpredictable those revenues can be. Creating a massive, permanent entitlement program under those conditions is fiscally reckless. Once it's in place, the only way to sustain it will be higher taxes, and that's a burden rural families and small businesses shouldn't have to shoulder.

There's also the issue of waste. Estimates suggest that 30 to 40 percent of school food already ends up in the trash. A universal meal program would only increase that waste, as many students, particularly from higher-income households, won't eat the meals at all. Yet taxpayers would still be paying for them.

I have also heard concerns from superintendents about added administrative strain and oversight challenges, especially for rural districts with limited staff. Other states have already experienced problems with waste and fraud in expanded meal programs, and there's no reason to believe we'd be immune.

Finally, North Dakota currently receives about \$15 million a year in federal funding for school meals. If the state takes over full responsibility, that funding is likely to disappear. The incentive for families to apply for the federally funded meal disappears. Once those dollars are gone, they won't come back.

I agree completely that every child deserves access to breakfast and lunch at school. Where I disagree is with a one-size-fits-all approach that ignores cost, efficiency, and long-term consequences.

Due to the anti-shaming law enacted in 2023, if a child appears at the lunch counter with a zero balance on his or her meal ticket, the school remains compelled to provide that child a meal, and rightfully so. However, that essentially means that the school district is left holding the ball, and major deficits need to be dealt with by that same school district. This is not fair play for the school district, that works very hard to support and care for our children.

Therefore, I would strongly support a targeted solution, one where the state covers shortfalls for children who truly need assistance and ensures school districts are made whole. That approach feeds every child who seeks help, protects local schools, preserves federal funding, and respects the taxpayers who make this possible.

We all want North Dakota's kids to succeed. We just need to make sure we're doing it responsibly, without creating problems we won't be able to fix later.

Mark Enget
Senate-D2-Powers Lake
Ph: 303-579-2267

Two Injured In Burke County Crash

A two vehicle crash that occurred west of Powers Lake on Saturday, Jan. 31 resulted in both drivers sustaining injuries.

According to the North Dakota Highway Patrol, the crash occurred at 6:15 p.m. on Highway 50 at mile marker 63, west of Powers Lake with icy road conditions caused by freezing rain.

A 2007 Kenworth semi, driven by Gregory Pharis, a 54 year old male from Gooding, ID, was traveling westbound on Highway 50, while a 1998 Chevrolet pickup driven by Shawn Hartwick, a 56 year old male from Powers Lake was traveling eastbound. Hartwick lost control on icy roads and crossed into the westbound lane. The Kenworth struck the pickup in a T-bone style collision on the passenger side of the pickup.

Pharis was not wearing a seatbelt and sustained minor injuries. He was transported to Tioga Medical Center for treatment. Hartwick was not wearing a seatbelt and sustained serious injuries. He was transported to Trinity Hospital in Minot.

The crash remains under investigation by the North Dakota Highway Patrol. Other agencies involved included the Burke County Sheriff's Office, Powers Lake Police Department, Powers Lake Ambulance Service and Powers Lake Fire Department.

Dr. Susan Asheim
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