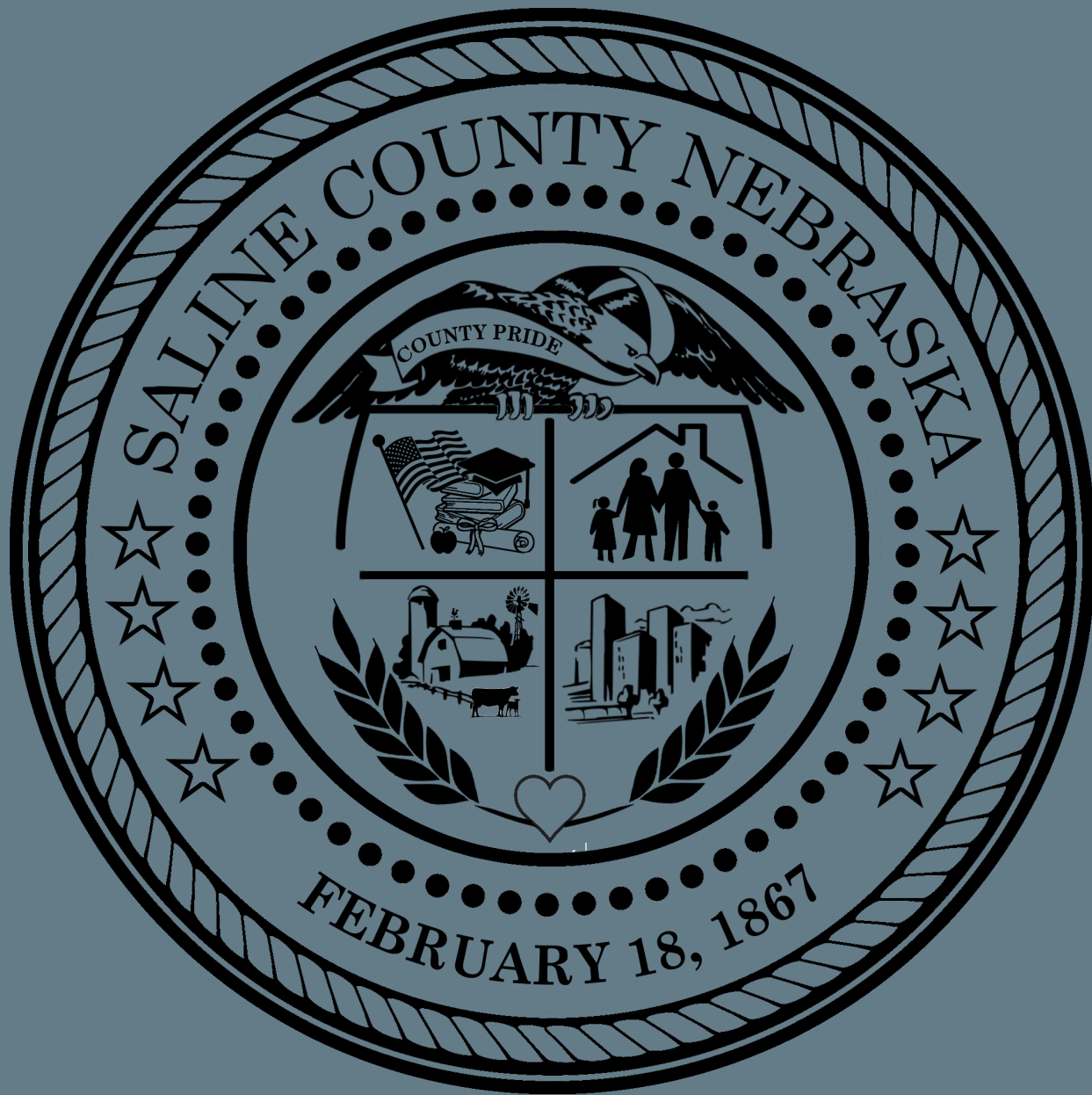


Saline County **PROGRESS**



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CRETE NEWS | FRIEND SENTINEL | WILBER REPUBLICAN, MARCH 31, 2021

Commander's Room adds audio, visual technology to new look

BY CAITLYN NELSON

caitlyn@sewardindependent.com

The Commander's Room in the Veterans and Friends building began getting a make-over in August after a Rotary grant donation and two community members volunteered their time. Less than a year later, the room has been renovated with lowered ceilings, painted walls, dimmable light fixtures and new audio and visual technology.

Tom Parker and Larry Eberspacher took it upon themselves to push the project farther than just new audio and visual technology, which is what a \$3,000 Crete Rotary grant allowed for. The grant was funded half by Rotary International and half by the Crete Rotary Club.

"Once we realized that we were going to get the grant money, it became clear that the carpeting on the wall needed to go," Paula Valenta said.

The renovations were reliant upon donations, not the grant money though.

One of the biggest drawbacks of the Commander's Room was that people couldn't



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

The Commander's Room in March 2021. The audio and visual equipment has been installed and the room is available for community use.

hear very well partly because of the poor acoustics the carpeting provided, Parker said.

Drywall was put up over the concrete walls with wood furrings behind to allow for hiding wires for the televisions and sound systems.

The project not only improved the visual appeal of the room, but was envisioned with the idea of saving money as well.

"By lowering the ceiling two feet, we will save 2,500-cubic-feet of space that doesn't have to be heated," Parker said. "So it's actually going to save money."

The new ceiling tiles are bright white, acoustic and mold and stain proof, as well as washable.

The 10 light fixtures were replaced with eight dimmable LED

light fixtures to allow for ambiance lighting. These LED lights use less than half the power as the former lights, which decreases electricity usage in the building.

Two 75-inch televisions were installed on the west wall to allow for powerpoints, slideshows, movies and other visuals to be available when the room is in use.

Along with the televisions, four speakers were installed and mounted on the walls for audio. Two cordless microphones were also purchased for the room.

Parker built a sound and video system box to contain the equipment needed to run the audio and visuals. This box is able to lock to keep the equipment safe.

This box also hous-

es a folder with step by step instructions on how to set up and run any audio/visual component is desired including DVD, laptop hook-up, music through an aux cord and the cordless microphones.

The Commander's Room can be rented by the community for class reunions, banquets, meetings or other gatherings.

With the renovations, Parker hopes more people will use this facility

and create more business for Crete Veterans and Friends.

For more information or to book the Commander's Room, contact Mike Wolverton at (402) 314-2252.



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Progress: Saline County moves forward one year after pandemic



It's been quite the year since the coronavirus pandemic began in the United States, leaving no stone unturned or location, including Saline County, untouched.

By now, we all know of someone who has been affected in some shape, way or form.

It might even be ourselves.

But admit all that 2020 and part of 2021 have brought us, Saline County has taken steps to move forward, push through difficulties and work towards a better future.

Our news staff spent that last year documenting it, strapping on face masks, getting temperatures checked and giving plenty of elbow bumps in the process.

Throughout these pages, take a look back at the positive, progressive things that have happened in the county.

Take a glimpse at the successful ventures, businesses and more that opened up despite a closed down world, all achieving the common goal of getting to a better day.

FILE PHOTO

Left: Flags flew half staff at the Saline County Courthouse in Wilber through sunset on Feb. 26 to honor the 500,000 people who have died from COVID-19.

Crete's Isis Theater, a continual work in progress

BY CAITLYN NELSON

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Resurrecting the goddess has taken longer than the Blue River Arts Council planned for, but the group has made progress on reviving the movie theater and bringing the community together.

The City of Crete purchased the building of the Isis Theater in February of 2019 for the Blue River Arts Council and the initial plan included a lobby and restroom design to make the entrance handicapped-accessible and to repair the ages marquee. The initial project budget was \$250,000 and was committed almost immediately thanks to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Over 150 community service hours were put in by BRAC members and community volunteers. As demolition and cleaning progressed, it became apparent more work would need to be done because of the age of the building. Phase two of the project was created to address a new \$675,00 budget for auditorium and building renovation and a new marquee.

After announcing the capital campaign and scope of the second phase at BRAC's Hops Around Crete event on leap day, Feb. 29, 2020, March was just around the corner with COVID-19 surging through Nebraska; Saline County became a national hotspot for the virus.

COVID-19 put a pause on fundraising for the theater, and shifted BRAC's attention to community building during a time when community members were forced to distance.

June 26-28 began BRAC's pop-up cinemas held at the Crete High School parking lot to allow community members to gather to watch a movie, while staying socially distanced. Free will donations were taken each night to cover the cost of equipment and movie rental. Popcorn was sold to raise money for the theater.

Pop-up popcorn sales were also available for community members to drive-through and pick up popcorn, with proceeds going to theater renovations.

BRAC also held a cruise-nights to



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

The Isis Theater auditorium interior looks different after old seating was removed.

allow for a socially-distanced fun for the community.

The arts council took time to focus on the community, but never forgot about their mission – to revive the goddess that is the Isis Theater.

Grant applications were started in August and two lead grants were announced in October. \$25,000 were given to BRAC from the Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation and \$1,000 was given by the Aksarben Foundation. In November, a \$100,000 grant from the Sunderland Foundation was awarded.

“With the Sunderland grant award, the theater renovation is now more than 60-percent funded,” BRAC president Shaylene Smith said. “COVID-10 slowed our progress and our fundraising efforts, but we are happy to be moving forward.”

Nestle Purina added to the donations to BRAC by delivering theater seats, around a \$1,700 donation, to Crete on Oct. 8 that were purchased at the beginning of the year by the arts council. Crete Lumber agreed to store the seats for free for the next year, until the seats can be installed in the theater.

In December, BRAC launched its local area campaign for \$100,000.

Local area residents, Geoff and Echo Easton, made the first gift of the campaign by pledging \$12,000 in recognition of two businesses they owned in Crete over the years – Mill Road and Art D'Echo.

A local anonymous donor granted a match-donation of \$50,000. Local donations made after March 1 are eligible for the match.



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

Representatives of Nestle Purina and the president of Blue River Arts Council stand in front of theater seats that were delivered to Crete on Oct. 8. At the beginning of the year, BRAC purchased replacement theater seating for the Isis Theater. Due to delays, the theater seating had to be held at its location until Nestle Purina made arrangements for it to be delivered to Crete - around \$1,700 donation for the council. Crete Lumber agreed to store it free for the next year, until the seats can be installed in the theater. Pictured from left, Taylor Larson and Emily Mountain with Nestle Purina, St. Louis Regional Transportation Manager Daniel Neil and BRAC president Shaylene Smith.



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

Crete City employees load a pickup with the projector pieces. The projector will be stored in the City power plant. Eventually the projector will be installed closer to the screen in the theater.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: CCLC students practice archery as part of their program experience.



Right: Students prepare food in a cooking and nutrition club at CCLC.

CCLC grows as program rebuilds; provides safe place for kids

BY CAITLYN NELSON

caitlyn@sewardindependent.com

Cardinal Community Learning Center is a free of charge service to Crete Public Schools students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade which includes enrichment learning, meals and a safe place for students to be at after school hours.

Currently, this is the second semester of the first year of the CCLA rebuilding process since Joel Bramhall began his position as CCLC director in May of 2020.

"The students are supervised, the students are fed and the students are safe," Bramhall said. "You couple that with enrichment learning and I think that's a win-win for everybody."

CCLC students are provided snacks, a free dinner and access to different clubs or structured enrichment learning, depending on the school attended.

In addition, any school-aged child

under the age of 18, even if they are not part of CCLC, may get a free dinner at the high school.

High school students are automatically enrolled in the program, but the other three schools require enrollment due to the number of CCLC staff available in those buildings.

Bramhall collected data on the first semester outcomes of the program to track growth of the program and give the staff information on what could be improved.

"We want to celebrate what we are doing well and celebrate that, but we also want to address head on the challenges, we want to face reality," Bramhall said.

Between August 13, 2020 and Dec. 22, 2020, the CCLC program reported:

846 students attend at least one day of the program with 418 of those already earned regular attendance status, which is at least one hour on 30 or more days;

306 students attend daily on aver-

age

45 percent of all (1,884) students have attending the program

21,275 snacks were served to students at all locations

6,731 dinners were served to students at all locations

55,435 hours of CCLC were attended

Middle School has 90 unique clubs

High School has 36 unique clubs

Six field trips were taken

Students have taken trips to a wildlife safari park near Ashland, Vala's Pumpkin Patch to learn entrepreneurship from the owner, the archway in Kearney and even to learn and practice archery.

The Middle School and High School programs differ from the younger two campuses in the fact they provide clubs, not just structured enrichment learning curriculum, to allow for students to voice their interests and get involved with things they are passionate about.

This include unique clubs including

Dungeons and Drafting, cycling, cooking and nutrition-based and more.

"A lot of it is about building job skills and learning the value of teamwork," Bramhall said.

The staff include one full-time director, four full-time site coordinators and 71 part-time staff, which offers at 15:1 ratio for staff to students. The part-time staff consist of Doane and other college-aged students and community members who want to share their passions with the students.

The funding for the after-school program is funding through 21st Century grant, a Congress-based fund that is dispersed through states.

In January, Bramhall submitted five-year continuation grants for two of the schools and will submit the continuation grants for the other two schools in a couple years to keep the program funded and able to grow.

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Saline County seal now on display at the Wilber courthouse

BY HOPE MOURAL
hope@sewardindependent.com

It's an estimated 340 pounds, four years in the making and to be frank, hard to miss.

What is it? The newest feature at the Saline County Courthouse, a concrete seal to represent the county and all it contains.

Nearly five years ago, the Saline County Commissioners approved both a county flag and seal to be created and eventually displayed.

So, in 2016 during the renovations to the courthouse, a five-foot long granite slab was taken from a wall, to be chunked out next with other pieces no longer needed.

After seeing this slab was in better condition than the rest, county administrative assistant, human resources and information technician Tim McDermott, along with others, suggested it be used to create the seal.

Soon a committee called the vexillology (study of flags) committee was formed, ideas were brainstormed and a design for the flag was mapped out. See sidebar.

Trump Memorials of Lincoln along with Berggren Architects came onboard to offer assistance throughout the seal's creation, which took place from 2018-2020.

Trump formed the circular share, sandblasted and lasered the seal into the concrete. Then they sent it to an engineer at Breggren who figured out how to support the over 300-pound display on a wall.

"We got the seal back (from Trump Memorials) in October 2020 and then we had to figure out how to get it from the basement of the courthouse to the first floor," McDermott said.

Finally, someone came up with a hydraulic system sort of solution and suggested a table of all things be used to get the seal on the wall.

McDermott spent a Friday afternoon creating the table with leftover scraps from his own garage and on Jan. 12, he, county maintenance supervi-

sor Dan Johnson and a few Saline County Sheriff's deputies took to the task of hanging the seal.

After a few hours and adjustments, the slab now hangs on the south wall near the entrance of the building, supported by a few pillars hidden behind the wall and a contraption made of brackets to keep it steady.

"I'm really thankful and glad it's done," McDermott said. "I think it's the capstone of the renovation project and it's a relief to have it up."

Meaning of seal (pictured on cover)

The Saline County Seal is a representative of the following:

The border plating a derivative of the Nebraska State seal. It proudly places the County of Saline within the borders of Nebraska as one political sub-division.

The county name is prominently displayed encircled toward the top of the center portion of the seal. Its founding date of Feb. 18, 1867 is balanced below as a rocker.

The eight stars represent each of the eight Saline County sub-divisions: Wilber, Crete, Dorchester, DeWitt, Western, Swanton, Tobias and Friend.

Each of the four elements in the center of the image represents the demographic areas of the population base of the county including family, agriculture, education and industry.


The two supporting and bordered wheat branches show the importance of the foundation that agriculture provides to Saline County. Each branch growing 11 kernels of wheat, for the total of 22, the county number of Saline.

The bald eagle goes without saying, an obvious representation of the pride and connection to the country.

At the base of the shield providing the collective elements of Saline County is the heart of the people who together contribute to the safety, prosperity and supportive wellbeing of the county community.


The rope band encircling the outer ring of the seal binds us as individual residents together in our united effort in support of our neighbors.



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COURTESY PHOTO

Pictured above is a concept drawing, not the final result, of the new Friend city pool. It is set to open the last weekend of May 2021.

Friend preps for new pool opening this Memorial Day weekend

BY HOPE MOURAL

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By the time this is read, opening day for the new Friend city pool won't be too far away.

A committee was formed, a ballot question to keep the pool was voted in and now almost three years later, the day is (almost) here.

The new facility, being completed by Carrothers Construction, is still on track to open Memorial Day weekend, or May 31, of this year.

"We put a lot of effort in the research and conversations with other communities that have undergone this type of project," Friend Pool Committee member Kristen Milton said.

As of the end of March, the pool floor and decking have been completely poured and the bath house and other shade structures are being advanced on daily.

But this is a dream that couldn't come true unless it was funded appropriately, and the Friend community showed up for the cause.

The project actually became a dream because the old pool, which was over 80 years old, was thought about being shut down because funding and upkeep were too expensive.

Friend residents voted in November 2019 to add an increased city sales tax to go toward the \$2.5 million bond that was approved by the pool.

In addition, the Friend Area Fund donated \$15,000 through the Ihde Foundation this past summer and other contributions continue to come in.

The Friend Pool Committee will be looking into both fundraising and grant options to supplement the bond.

Collaboration was also a key part of making the pool come to life, with everyone from city

workers, government officials and donators helping to make the process easy.

Details of the new facility include a diving platform, a Friend Bulldog-themed slide and other fun water features among others.

"The circular pool is iconic to Friend and we know how important it is to everyone here," Milton said. "To keep with the theme, we incorporated it into the kids pool area."

Although it's been a long time in the making, members of the pool committee are happy to see the excitement and anticipation of kids and parents in the area.

They are grateful to see the support of the newest addition to Friend and know it's a success only because people were willing to work together.

"We're proud to give back to our community and excited to see what our community came together to accomplish," Milton said.

CPS Welcome Center set for completion this summer

BY CAITLYN NELSON
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“You’re one stop shop for all things Crete Public Schools,” CPS superintendent Joshua McDowell calls the new welcoming center/administration building.

The concept for this all-in-one Crete Public Schools location was conceived with the idea to remove barriers that some families may have when having to travel to different locations to sign students up for different school buildings, ask questions and utilize the different resources the school district offers.

The former Shopko building was purchased in 2018 and progress began on renovating the building for school purposes.

“It just made sense that if we move the current administration building over here, if we bring in our special programs in here and all of our adult education, that removes some barriers for some families,” McDowell said. “Come here [to the new welcoming center] and we will get you everything that you need.”

When completed, when you walk into the front doors you will be greeted by two stations – a welcoming center and reception desk. Parents will be able to sign their children up for school from computers available or a receptionist will be there for assistance.

A large, open board room in the entry will allow for the community to use the meeting space as well.

The building will have administration and special program offices as well as a large conference room with audio and visual technology built in. There will be two General Educational Development testing rooms to be utilized and a mini apartment for Sixpence to use for educational purposes.

Two mother rooms are also being added to the floor plan to allow privacy for mothers who need to nurse. A breakroom and more bathrooms are also included in the building.

Part of the building will be left unfinished for expansion in the future

as needed.

The “shell” of the building was the first to be worked on with brand new HVAC and electrical systems. The framing began after the Super Bowl which began to shape room dimensions. A new roof will be installed at the beginning of April followed by exterior work to complete the structure and design of the building.

CPS worked with Iron Hyde Construction out of Lincoln and CMBA Architects out of Grand Island to work on this project.

This building will be phase one of the district’s plans to remove barriers for families.

Phase two will be what to do with the current administration building,



COURTESY PHOTO

Exterior is taken off the former Shopko building to be renovated into the new Welcome Center.

which McDowell said may be used for preschool in the future. This will allow for all kids to be on one side of the road and allow playground access and a building with a kitchen next door in the Elementary Building.

“Long term, phase three of the project is probably to bring the elementary and preschool into one building to have this awesome preschool and elementary campus,” McDowell said. “In order for us to even think about that, we had to have this [welcoming] space.”

As CPS grows, now into four school buildings, the support staff increases as well. The welcoming center will be used to support the staff as well as students.



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

Design layout for the entryway for the new Crete Public Schools Welcome Center.



COURTESY PHOTO

Beginning stages of the work done inside the new Welcome Center building for CPS is pictured above.



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

Framing was done inside of the Welcome Center as of the beginning of March.

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Tuxedo Park gets new bridge

BY CAITLYN NELSON
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The wooden, one-way bridge allowing access to Tuxedo Park on Tuxedo Park Road was torn down to be replaced with a similar, two-lane bridge with a dedicated walkway. Tuxedo Park bridge was closed starting Sept. 21 with the road barri-

caded for work to be done. This project was done with an 80-20 federal share. The county agreed to split the 20-percent with the city so each paid 10-percent of the \$1,290,904.65 project done by K2 Real Estate Development, LLC out of Lincoln. The new bridge is expected to be completed this spring.



CAITLYN NELSON/CN

The one-lane, wooden Tuxedo Park bridge before demolition and construction on a new two-lane bridge. Photo taken Sept. 17, 2020.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: Progress of Tuxedo Park bridge from Oct. 8 and Dec. 22. Photos were shared with the Crete city council in January to show progress of the bridge along with an update on how the crew is moving along with the project.

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Scooters opens doors at Crete location

BY CAITLYN NELSON
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Scooters opened its drive-through window in Crete just in time for 2021.

This business, owned by Scott Meinke and Eric Neff, work for a general contractor in Lincoln whose company has built a number of Scooters. This intrigued the two about the idea of opening and operating one themselves.

Meinke and Neff called the Scooter's franchise around two years ago and approached them about expanding to Crete.

"At the time they weren't sure on the concept of the smaller towns," Meinke said.

At the beginning of 2020, Scooters, Neff and Meinke reconnected and a franchise agreement was signed in April.



Scooters in Crete, located at 2125 Cardinal Lane, is open for public to drive-through and order drinks and all-day breakfast.

Building construction began in October and the business opened Dec. 31.

"We had to set some sort of record

for being built and open in such a short amount of time," Meinke said.

Meinke and Neff had an advantage being general contractors themselves and having connections with other contractors.

"Scooters had goals for us and one of them was to get the store open before the end of 2020," Meinke said. "We committed to doing that and it

was a lot of work, but it was definitely worth it. It was exciting to get it done that quick and get it open."

Training for the staff began on Dec. 26, to get the employees prepared for the customer flow.

A drive-through approach was chosen not only because it was cheaper than walk-in, but also because of the convenience.

"We didn't want a coffee shop, we wanted a Scooters drive-through kiosk," Meinke said.

Meinke, born and raised in Crete, knew the community and the excitement of name brands joining community businesses. Bringing a business to town, instead of having people drive to get the product was something Meinke considered when joining this franchise.

"The community reaction to our new Scooter's has been overwhelming," Neff said. "The excitement from the start of construction, all the way through the opening and beyond, has been amazing."

Saline Medical Plaza reopens

BY CAITLYN NELSON
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Saline Medical Plaza opened its doors when Crete Physical Therapy moved into the former Premier Estates building at 830 East 1st Street in October 2020.

Since then, Brighter Future Day-care moved locations to this building and in mid-May Saline Medical Specialties plans to make the move.

Saline Medical Plaza, LLC, owned by Josue Gutierrez and Casey Moeller, started this business project in the fall of 2020 after purchasing the building and being granted \$100,000

of LB840 funds for building renovations.

The plan for this location was to create a place where community members can go for any medical needs. Recruiting is still happening for more medical businesses to be included.

"The goal of SMP is to bring to Crete and surrounding counties a fully functional and integrated model of health care that has been proven to be success in other parts of the country and thus provide up to date, patient centered care for our community," the LB840 application said.

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“Everything has a story” Friend Antiques officially opens

BY HOPE MOURAL
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Robbin Schemm wants you to know upfront that she does not keep antiques in her home, but that doesn't mean she appreciates historical items any less. After all, she loves a good story.

Schemm, along with her husband Randy, is the owner of both Crete and Friend Antiques, the latter of which officially opened earlier this month.

“I had some people come into the Crete store and encourage me to go to Friend,” Schemm said. “I’ve heard people ask if there is an antique store in Friend.”

Now there is at 130 Maple Street downtown. Schemm held her grand opening of the store Feb. 11-13 and said despite the weather, there was a steady flow of visitors.

Originally from Scott City, Kansas, Schemm ran a high-end boutique before moving to Nebraska to be closer to family around five years ago.

Since then, the Schemms have ran Crete Antiques and finally expanded

over to Friend’s business area.

Husband Randy runs the Crete store and Schemm manages the Friend store Thursdays-Saturday, opening at 10 a.m. to close.

“Friend is such a supportive community and that’s part of what drew me here,” Schemm said. “It’s an up-and-coming community, and if I can help with business, that’s good.”

The location also helps put Friend on the map, by being an additional stop on Highway 6 for shoppers who like to travel. There are also shops on that route in Fairmont, Crete, Seward and Utica.

It’s not a requirement for items on display in the Friend Antiques store to be from the area, but a good majority are. Over time, Schemm hopes more people will bring in local items to represent the town and learn more of its historical aspect.

Another component of the store is that there is always free coffee for people to enjoy and the store even features what Schemm calls “the coffee room.”

People can not only shop items, but sit for a spell, chat or play a game of cards if desired. Bags of coffee are



also available as well as dips and soups.

Schemm does a little bit of consignment and sometimes will look at larger items at a person’s home if the situation calls for it, although she does not go to appraise anything.

“What would sell in Denver (Colorado) won’t sell the same in Friend,” Schemm explains.

Both Crete and Friend Antiques

will deliver items as well, mostly in Saline County although the Schemms have traveled to Lincoln before.

At the end of the day, it’s about getting a historical item to those who desire it.

Everything has a story. I like history and preserving things,” Schemm said. “It’s in my heart to serve that way.”



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Smith new face of Friend Police Department

BY HOPE MOURAL

hope@sewardindependent.com

Grady Hampton Smith III was once in a death metal band, but thankfully for the Friend community, that didn't work out.

Smith is the newest addition to the Friend Police Department, after officially being hired during the city council's January meeting.

Smith, a Georgia native, moved to Nebraska around four years ago to live with a few friends in Lincoln after the music career didn't work out and he

spent time in the United States Marine Corps and Navy.

"I knew Gray (Friend Police chief Shawn Gray) from working in state corrections," Smith said.

He had previously worked for a few months as a deputy with the Fillmore County Sheriff's Department before reaching out to Gray about a position in Friend.

Smith joined the military straight out of high school, served in the aforementioned branches, before becoming an advocate for

sexual assault victims and finally, becoming a professional musician.

"Unfortunately, you can't make a lot of money doing that," Smith said. "So I went back to school."

He studied cybersecurity and ethical hacking online of the Diversions Academy before realizing that wasn't where his true interest lay.

So Smith became at deputy in Fillmore County and now he is in Friend.

Smith said he isn't about the "reactive" situations that law

enforcement officers get involved in, but joined the force to protect citizens.

"It's not so much about the power as it is the responsibility," Smith said. "In my time (in Friend) I've been

learning about the community dynamic and getting to know people."

He hopes to focus on community engagement in the Friend community as he awaits to attend the police academy in May.

Currently, he is focused on learning procedures when it comes to the law and getting to know people.

"Right now I want to develop skills in the community and help people," Smith said.

FPS to get FFA greenhouse soon

Board gives program chance to grow

BY HOPE MOURAL

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The Friend Public School Board of Education officially approved the purchase and construction of a greenhouse to be built on or near its grounds during its Nov. 9 meeting.

It may be safe to say no one is more excited about that than Exeter-Milligan/Friend ag instructor Amy Tomlinson. She applied for a \$10,000 Nebraska FFA Foundation Local Chapter Program grant earlier this year and was awarded it back in September.

The grant was written with the intent of building a greenhouse.

"My reaction to getting this grant was elation," Tomlinson said. "I was so excited to know we are going to be able to start the process of getting a greenhouse."

The greenhouse will be used by students of the EMF FFA chapter, and Tomlinson is rolling in ideas and activities for them, including growing everything from mums to tomatoes, learn plant grafting and

complete agriscience fair programs.

Students will learn how to design their own planter and sell produce in the Friend community as well.

Tomlinson hopes to potentially use the space for not only students, but community events that may present themselves.

FPS superintendent David Kraus presented the project to the City of Friend during its Nov. 3 council meeting.

"We just want to have the city's blessing and they were very excited," Kraus said.

Final approval for the project has yet to go through, but Tomlinson said students who know about the greenhouse seem excited to get started.

Both Kraus and Tomlinson agree that having a greenhouse space will offer that much more on-hands exposure students need to learn and grow skills.

"I feel like ag education does a great job of providing real world experience to students," Tomlinson said. "The greenhouse will offer students a place to expand their learning beyond the four walls of a classroom."



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Wilber-Clatonia students settle into new agricultural building

BY HOPE MOURAL
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Rabbits, tarantulas and a cockatoo bird named Sassy: these are just a few of the animals located in the newly constructed Lambert Zoubek agricultural building at Wilber-Clatonia Public Schools.

Classes were first held in the new building february 2020, but it was short-lived because of COVID-19's presence in the United States.

Still, that does not make ag instructor Dusten Bruss any less excited.

"The students love it in here, I mean, they get to play with animals, eat and utilize all this equipment," Bruss said. "Classes are getting bigger and there's a lot more enthusiasm (with this new building)."

The building consists of a classroom and both a live animal and meat lab. Bruss said the number of FFA members jumped from 55 to 89 this year.

W-C FFA chapter vice president Aspen Oliver said the meat lab is something she believes will help the chapter rise above all the rest.

"We get more opportunities meat-wise and butcher-wise," Oliver said. "It's helping people get involved and more of us to enter SAEs (supervised agricultural experiences)."

Both Bruss and Oliver agree support from the community is what makes the new building a success. Wilber resident Lambert Zoubek donated \$1 million in spring of 2018 to make it happen. Not only that, but Bruss said all animals except the rabbits were donated or paid for by community members.

"Wilber is really good about being grateful, and I think they knew this is a big opportunity for us," Oliver said.

Within the new facility, almost everything is hands-on for the students, whether it's fabricating half a hog in the meats lab or giving vaccinations to goats and sheep in the live animal lab.

Bruss even recalled earlier this year when four sheep went into labor in the lab, all at the same time while he was out of state, and he had to walk



HOPE MOURAL/WR

Wilber-Clatonia ag educator Dusten Bruss displays a bearded dragon for students to see during class this past fall.

some students through what to do.

Although the building is completed, Bruss has many activities and plans he can't wait to begin, everything from landscaping ideas to planting fruit trees.

"I have lots of projects in my head," Bruss said. "The wheels are always turning."

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