

OCTOBER 11, 2023

# SALUTE *to* FIRE FIGHTERS

**CN**  
Crete News

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Friend Sentinel

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Wilber Republican

## Three generations of serving the Crete Fire Department

BY HANNA CHRISTENSEN  
scireporter@sewardindependent.com

Lifetime Crete resident Nikki Wells and her daughter, Dakota, are part of a legacy spanning three generations of service at the Crete Fire Department.

Nikki's father, Richard Seeman, was on the firefighter team from 1973 to 1984. Nikki, who previously worked in a hospital setting and in long-term care, decided to join the department in 2014 after her daughter graduated because she wanted a new challenge.

Neither Nikki nor her daughter always knew they wanted to be firefighters, and they both started their careers pursuing health care and worked at Tabitha in Crete before joining the fire department. They are also both now special education paras at Crete Public Schools. They said they have always had the same passion: helping others.

"I kind of got joked into coming into the fire department, and I ended

up being really good at it," Dakota said.

Dakota started as a firefighter in April of last year and passed her emergency medical technician class at the end of last month. She and her mom both said they enjoy using their medical knowledge to help others. Now, they are both officially firefighter EMTs.

"We work very well together," Nikki said. "We know the stuff will get done; we can rely on each other."

Dakota said her mom has helped her expand her knowledge in the medical and emergency services fields over the years. She said working with her on emergency calls was especially helpful during her early days at the fire department because her mom was aware of exactly what she knew and what she still had to improve upon.

"I've always worked with my mom," Dakota said. "I've learned so much from her."

Dakota's boyfriend,



DOUG CARROLL/CN/FS/WR

**Nikki Wells, right, and her daughter Dakota, both volunteers with the Crete Fire Department, pose next to mom's locker and the photos of other family members who have served with the fire department.**

AJ Page, is also a third generation Crete firefighter. Page, who is currently serving in the military and stationed in Africa, grew

up with a father, Josh, and a grandfather, Bob, who also served on the department.

Dakota said the fire station is like its own

little family, and her family connections allowed her to get to know the members long before she joined the team.

"My favorite thing about my job is not only the people that we get to help when we get called, but the people we do it with," she said.

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# Crete Volunteer Fire Department

AMY HAUSMAN/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Crete Volunteer Fire Department in 2023 include, from left: (first row) Carlos Mayo, Terry Petracek, Phillip Oeschlager, Henry Perez, Alvo Miguel-Jacinot, Marvin Barlow, Brandon Smejdir, Landon Chao, James Yost and Kaiden Smith; (second row) Dakota Wells, Nikki Wells, Elayne Woods, Melissa Clouse, Steph Yost, Sarah Theiler, Tiffany Carnahan, Abbie Wilett and Carissa Moore; and (third row) Tod Allen, Tim McLaughlin, Hayden DeBoeer, Brad Elder and Gene Garza.



# Clatonia Volunteer Fire Department

AMY HAUSMAN/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Clatonia Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Brady Fuller, Jon Strunk, Laura Niles, Justin Haack, Riley Haack, Shane Cline and Matt Niemeyer; and (back row) Pat Derickson, Max Latshaw, Josh Niles, Ian McDougall, Karel Polacek, Jason Siems, Jessie Hajek and John Kaiser.

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# DeWITT VOL. FIRE DEPT.

## DeWitt Volunteer Fire Department

DOUG CARROLL/CN/FS/WR

Members of the DeWitt Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Kerri Thornburg, Kristi Rahe, Brittany Murray, Tim Garrison, Shawn Weise and Sam Kirchoff; and (back row) Jackson Kirchoff, Dale Seachord, Lyle Fink, Kyle Pohlmann, Brad Gronenthal, Eugene Shores and Doug Stokebrand.



## Dorchester Volunteer Fire Department

STEPHANIE CROSTON/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Dorchester Volunteer Fire Department are, from left: (front row) Aaron Edinger, Cory Schleuter, Jacob Railsback, Hannah Railsback, James Bond, Todd Axline, Rebecca Steuk and Andrew Pracheil; and (back row) Jesse Daws, Brant Pracheil, Jerad Fuller, Justin Cecrle, Marcus Kastanek, Tim Stehlik, Matt Steuk and Brent Kasl. Travis Fuller is not pictured.

## Milligan Volunteer Fire Department

NOT PICTURED: The Milligan Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department includes Michael Nadherny, Gabe Jaeger, Dennis Kotas, Lois Kotas, Kim Gurley, Daniel Kotas, Daniel Nadherny, Adrienne Capek, Justin White, Scott Oliva, Bruce Filipi, Jeff Spiehs, Larry Michl, John Kassik, Steve Briskie, William Fogel, Garrett Hafer, Dean Kassik, Michael Kassik, James Korbelik, Douglas Kotas, Rose Oliva, Brad Scarf, Yvonne Steinacher, Kyle Svec, Alex Uldrich, Tyler Williams, Brian Zelenka, Brandon Zoubek and Jordan Zwickl.

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## Exeter Volunteer Fire Department

LEESA K. BARTU/CN/FS/WR

Exeter Volunteer Fire Department members gather in front of the new attack truck. They are, from left: (front row) Adam Chrans, Lisa Ring, Hope Strate, Vicki Androyna, Dan Everhart, Joe Miller, Jackie Miller, Shari Michl, Starlene Benorden, Derek Axline, Richard Erdkamp and Doug Papik; and (back row) John Graham, Tim Wilbeck, Terry Salyer, Ken Strate, John Mueller, Dylan Ring, Jameson Trauger, Sean Gibson, Alan Michl, Lane Strate, Dylan Axline and Mark Beethe.



## Friend Volunteer Fire Department

AMY HAUSMAN/CN/WR/FS

Members of the Friend Volunteer Fire Department in 2023 are, from left: (front row) Ben Paulsen, Tim Paulsen, Logan Milton, Stanley Krause, Brent Milton, Jake Clouse, Eric Bardell, Sara Thomsen, Tony Ryan and Kevin Spicka; (second row) Jared Vossler, Darren Thompson, Gary Rohrig, Holly Kohout, Jewels Knoke, Seth Knoke, Dalton Brandt, Spence Wessels, Graham Stutzman and Austin Rohrig; and (back row) Bob Milton, Ray Rohrig, Allen Bruntz, Rick Ricenbaw, Charles Slama and Brad Ricenbaw.

# Follow tips to make homes safer from fires

Over a five-year period beginning in 2015 and 2019, fire departments across the United States responded to roughly 347,000 home structure fires per year. That data, courtesy of the National Fire Protection Association, underscores the significance of home fire protection measures.

Smoke detectors are a key component of fire protection, but there's much more homeowners can do to protect themselves, their families, their belongings and their homes from structure fires.

- Routinely inspect smoke detectors. Smoke detectors can only alert residents to a fire if they're working properly. Battery-powered smoke detectors won't work if the batteries die. Routine smoke detector check-ups can ensure the batteries still have juice and that the devices themselves are still functioning properly. Test alarms to make sure the devices are functioning



and audible in nearby rooms. Install additional detectors as necessary so alarms and warnings can be heard in every room of the house.

- Hire an electrician to audit your home. Electricians can inspect a home and identify any issues that could make the home more vulnerable to fires. Ask electricians to look over every part of the house, including attics and crawl spaces. Oft-overlooked areas like attics and crawl spaces pose a po-

tentially significant fire safety threat, as data from the Federal Emergency Management Association indicates that

13% of electrical fires begin in such spaces.

- Audit the laundry room. The laundry room is another potential source of home structure fires. NFPA data indicates around 3% of home structure fires begin in laundry rooms each year. Strategies to reduce the risk of laundry room fires include leaving room for laundry to tumble in washers and dryers; routinely cleaning lint screens to avoid the buildup of dust, fiber and lint, which the NFPA notes are often the first items to ignite in fires linked to dryers; and ensur-

ing the outlets washing machines and dryers are plugged into can handle the voltage such appliances require. It's also a good idea to clean dryer exhaust vents and ducts every year.

- Look outward as well. Though the majority of home fires begin inside, the NFPA reports that 4% of such fires begin outside the home. Homeowners can reduce the risk of such fires by ensuring all items that utilize fire, including grills and firepits, are always used at least 10 feet away from the home. Never operate a grill beneath eaves, and do

not use grills on decks. Never leave children unattended around firepits, as all it takes is a single mistake and a moment for a fire to become unwieldy.

- Sweat the small stuff. Hair dryers, hair straighteners, scented candles, clothes irons, and holiday decorations are some additional home fire safety hazards. Never leave candles burning in empty rooms and make sure beauty and grooming items like dryers, straighteners and irons are unplugged and placed in a safe place to cool down when not in use.

Thank you for your service!

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# Plymouth Volunteer Fire Department

COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Plymouth Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department are, from left: Dave Schmidt, Alan Gronemeyer, Kaleb Nickel, Cory Parks, Lee Nickel, Evan Brandt, Jon Zulauf, Taylor Koch, Anna Gronenthal, Chad Weichel, Andy Kreikemeier, Shane Vorderstrasse, Bryan Paxton, Matt Umland, Greg Schultis, Randy Ebke, Brian Schwisow, Brad Eisenhauer, Reegon Witt, Jeremy Connelly and Barry Weichel. Not pictured are Ahren Ambrose, Brett Scheiding, Chris Mammen, Derick Meyer, Gary Vorderstrasse, Greg Meints, Jim Franzen, Jim Earnhart, Justin Weichel and Noah Fuller.



# Swanton Volunteer Fire Department

DOUG CARROLL/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Swanton Volunteer Fire Department include, from left: (front row) Justin Pribyl, Tim Likens, Tom Bass, Larry Barta, Jared Deke and Bob Homolka; and (back row) Alan Strouf, Dennis Bessler, Gary Jiskra, Gary Barta, Eric Byers, Travis Likens and Lynn Strouf. Not pictured are Lonnie Karl, Jim Vales, Austin Nicholson, Jim Toof and Cory Parks.



# Tobias Volunteer Fire Department

KEATON BURGESS/CN/FS/WR

Pictured are the members of the Tobias fire department, from left: (front row) Larry Schafer, Casey Hansen, Dan Bartels, Gary Boxa, Lonnie Shafer, Jaicee Sobotka and Hailey Schafer; and (back row) Shane Roesler, Brandon Bartels, Alan Lintz, Brayden Rut, Drew Niederklein and Kolby Shafer. Not pictured are Nick Maas, Matt Maas and Scott Sobotka.



## Western Volunteer Fire Department

STEPHANIE CROSTON/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Western Volunteer Fire Department include, from left: (front row) Andy Schoenbeck, Rod Paul, Scott Theis, Butch Nickel, Caleb Kotas, Layne Schelbitzki, Mark Kratochvil and Bill Schwisow; and (back row) Henry Orf, Kent Musil, Colby Krueger, Kevin Homolka, Frank Myers, Bryan Kotas, Mike Homolka, Alan Orf and Colby Walker. Not pictured are Bob Burton, Alexis Henk, Seth Keller, Rob McKenzie, Justin Rezabek, Todd Schelbitzki, Kelli Schoenbeck, Brad Schwisow, Kevin Schwisow, Jeff Stewart and Jared Zoubek.



## Wilber Volunteer Fire Department

KEATON BURGESS/CN/FS/WR

Members of the Wilber Volunteer Fire Department include, from left: (front row) Chief Scott Havel, Will Togstad, Brad Schuerman, Derek Filipi, Jerrod Zoubek, Dennis Baber and James Doiel; and (back row) Loren Coffey, Tyler Havel, Tonja Vyhnaelek, Craig Vyhnaelek and Trevor Kvasnicka. Not pictured are Dustin Burns, Chris Cerveny, Matt Gross, Lucas Havel, Randy Homolka, Chan Hoover, Kaleb Kotas, Pat Meister, Baylee Mulbery, Justin Nickel, Matt Petracek, Tom Petracek, Coltin Rezabek, Ann Roesler, Marvin Sasek, Andrew Seyfert, Nathan Thompson, Cody Williamson and David Zimmerman.

# Burn candles safely for holidays, beyond

Candles are not in short supply come the holiday season.

During Chanukah, candles are an integral component of celebrating the miracle of oil that burned in the Temple for eight days.

Celebrants of Kwanzaa utilize candles to represent the seven principles of the holiday.

Christians light candles during Christmas services and in their homes to represent the light Jesus brought to the world.

There is no denying the warmth and beauty candles can bring to a home when they are flickering delicately. But candles have open flames, so caution must reign

supreme when they are in use.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission says 85% of candle fires can be prevented by following some key safety precautions. The National Fire Protection Association says Christmas is the most dangerous day for candle fires. Here is how to burn candles safely.

- Always trim wicks to 1/4-inch before burning candles. Long or crooked wicks can cause uneven burning, dripping or flaring.

- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn.

- Use candle holders that are sturdy and will not tip over easily.



- Use a long match or long lighter to light candles to prevent fingers and hands from getting too close to the flames.

- Run used matches under water to cool them down and prevent fires from occurring after matches are disposed in the trash.

- Never leave a candle unattended. It should be in sight

at all times.

- Place and store candles beyond the reach of children and pets where they will be less likely to get knocked over.

- Never touch or move a candle while it is burning or while the wax is liquefied.

- Place candles on stable, heat-resistant surfaces.

- Keep candles away from drafts, vents and air currents.

- Follow candle manufacturers' recommendations on burn time and proper use.

- When utilizing multiple candles, place them at least three inches apart from one another. This reduces the chances for the candles to melt one another, or create

their own drafts that will cause the candles to burn improperly.

- Extinguish a candle if the flame becomes too high or flickers repeatedly.

- Refrain from burning a candle longer than three hours at a time, and never burn a candle when there is less than one centimeter of wax at the base.

- Use a candle snuffer to safely extinguish a candle, and make sure the candle is completely out (wick ember is no longer glowing) before leaving the room.

Candles can be awe-inspiring components of holiday decor. But caution must always be the top priority when lighting candles inside a home.



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