

1 Critically Injured In Omaha Blaze

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say one person has been critically injured in a fire at an Omaha business. Douglas County emergency dispatchers say the fire started around 11 a.m. Monday at an auto repair garage near the northeast corner of 50th and F streets. Fire officials closed off streets in the area and contained the fire by noon. Dispatchers say the injured person was taken to Nebraska Medical Center. The name and condition of the person haven't been released. The *Omaha World-Herald* reports that the building is owned by A-1 United Heating and Cooling. The cause of the fire wasn't immediately available.

SD Tribe Struggles With Teen Suicides

PINE RIDGE (AP) — The people of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation are no strangers to hardship or to the risk of lives being cut short. But a recent string of seven suicides by teenagers has shaken this impoverished community and sent tribal leaders on an urgent mission to stop the deaths. The deaths begin in December, when a 14-year-old boy hanged himself. The most recent were in March, when two students took their lives. The youngest to die was 12. Parents and officials say the reasons for the suicides include the reservation's poverty, bullying at school and the overall decimation of the Native American culture. Volunteer federal mental health counselors have begun two-week rotations at the reservation to counsel young people. Teachers are asking students to come forward with information about suicide pacts.

Post Office Honors Soldier Killed In Iraq

CHADRON, Neb. (AP) — A formal ceremony has been scheduled to mark the naming of the Chadron post office after a soldier killed in Iraq more than 11 years ago. Chadron radio station KCSR reports that Friday's ceremony honors Sgt. Cory Mracek, of Hay Springs, who died in January 2004 while serving with the 82nd Airborne Division. He was killed by a roadside bomb west of Baghdad. His mother, Pat, worked at the post office at the time of his death. Cory Mracek was born in Chadron and graduated from Hay Springs High School.

Ex-NFL Player Suspected In Prison Killing

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Former NFL running back Lawrence Phillips is suspected of killing his cellmate in a Central California prison, officials said Monday. Phillips' cellmate at Kern Valley State Prison was found lifeless early Saturday and later pronounced dead, prison spokesman Lt. Marshall Denning said in a statement. Phillips, 39, was once one of the nation's top college football players at Nebraska. He played for the St. Louis Rams, until being released in 1997 for insubordination. He also played for the Miami Dolphins and San Francisco 49ers. Phillips is serving a sentence of more than 31 years. He was convicted of twice choking his girlfriend in 2005 in San Diego and later that year of driving his car into three teens after a pickup football game in Los Angeles. It wasn't clear if Phillips has an attorney. He is suspected of killing Damion Soward, a 37-year-old inmate from San Bernardino County serving 82 years to life for a first-degree murder conviction. Prison officials said they suspect a second inmate at the prison of killing his cellmate. It's unclear if the two are related. John Munoz, a 24-year-old sentenced to 42 years on for sexual battery and other charges in Los Angeles County, is suspected of killing cellmate, 41-year-old Rattanak Kim, who was serving a sentence of 35-years to life for conspiracy to commit murder in San Diego County. Prison officials are investigating both deaths along with the Kern County Coroner and Kern County District Attorney, prison officials said.

2 Die In Brandon Fire

BY REGINA GARCIA CANO
Associated Press

BRANDON — A homeowner and a volunteer firefighter died after a blaze engulfed a home in the southeast South Dakota city of Brandon. The homeowner was pronounced dead at a hospital after firefighters rescued him from his one-story home Sunday night, minutes after his daughter was woken up by the fire alarm and sought help. The body of the firefighter was discovered hours later in the home's basement, where authorities suspect the blaze began. Brandon Police Chief David Kull identified the homeowner as 47-year-old David Smith. The firefighter was 38-year-old Steven Ackerman with the Valley Springs Fire Department. Firefighters responded to the scene shortly after 10 p.m. Sunday and encountered heavy smoke coming from the garage. Smith was taken from the home around 10:35 p.m., and five minutes later, all firefighters were ordered out of the burning home. Ackerman was reported missing about 11 p.m. His body was found in the basement about 1:30 a.m. Monday and recovered around 10:30 a.m., when it was transported to the coroner's office. The cause of death of both men has not been determined.

"This is going to have ripples throughout the whole area; this is going to affect firefighters in the state and the area pretty hard," Brandon Fire Chief Gary Lembcke said of Ackerman's passing. "Unfortunately, this is sometimes what it takes to bring people together, but there will be quite a gathering of firefighters coming together to give this brother the respect he deserves." The fire marshal inspected part of the garage late Monday morning. The cause of the fire will be determined over the next few weeks, but authorities say they do not believe it is suspicious.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/TNS
President Barack Obama, seen here speaking at the White House earlier this month, will be speaking at the Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown in May.

At Last: Obama Schedules Stop In South Dakota

BY REGINA GARCIA CANO
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — President Barack Obama will have visited all 50 states when he tours a northeastern South Dakota community college next month. During an interview with KSFY-TV anchor Nancy Naeve, Obama on Monday announced that he will give the commencement speech at Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown. Naeve was among a number of anchors from TV stations from various states who met with Obama at the White House. Lake Area Technical Institute President Mike Cartney in December was among the attendees at the White House College Opportunity Summit. The school has been a top 10 national finalist for the Aspen Community College Excellence Award three consecutive times and has one of the highest graduation and placement rates in the nation. The summit drew colleges and universities, business leaders, nonprofit groups and others who support expanding college opportunities for students. South Dakota is the only state Obama has not been to as president. He did stop in the state in 2008 when he was a senator campaigning for the Democratic Party's nomination for president. He spoke last year in North Dakota on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddles that state's border with South Dakota. Obama had made it to just 46 states by the start of the year. That left Idaho, South Carolina, Utah and South Dakota without a presidential sighting. The White House quickly scheduled presidential appearances in Idaho and South Carolina, and Obama stopped in Utah earlier this month. When Obama does make it to South Dakota, the White House Historical Association says he will be only the fourth president to have touched down in every state. The commencement is scheduled for May 8.

Study: Most SD Highway Fatalities Weren't Using Seatbelts

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Highway safety data from 2008 through 2013 show motorists and passengers who weren't wearing seat belts died much more frequently in crashes in South Dakota. The rates were approximately two to three times higher, according to the most recent report from the state Department of Public Safety. The top reason for the high number of unbelted fatalities has been ejections from the vehicle. Of 103 people killed in 2013, for example, 61 weren't using seatbelts in any form. Of them, 41 died after they were ejected or partially ejected. Ejections accounted for a majority of the unbelted fatalities in each of the six years. The numbers exclude motorcycles, ATVs, mopeds and snowmobiles.

The state Office of Highway Safety began running a new promotional campaign this month urging use of seatbelts. The effort came after 15 of the first 18 fatalities this year weren't wearing seatbelts. South Dakota requires use of seatbelts by drivers, front-seat passengers and all children older than five years and younger than 18. Child passenger restraint systems are required for children younger than age five. However, violations are classified as petty offenses, subject to \$25 fines, and are enforced as secondary offenses. That means law enforcement can't issue a ticket unless the vehicle is stopped for another reason. Rep. Dick Warner, R-Huron, attempted to increase the fine to \$50 this year. But the state House of Representatives rejected his legislation by a vote of 22 yes

and 45 no on Feb. 5. Both the state Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety publicly supported its passage. Neither the high number of ejections or the low support by legislators for a stiffer penalty is surprising when another set of information about South Dakota is considered. A formal study in 2014 found seatbelt use in a sample group of 16 South Dakota counties was 68.9 percent by vehicle occupants. That compared to a national average of 87 percent reported for 2013 by the federal government. The low in South Dakota for 2014 was 43.6 percent in Shannon County. The high was 89.3 percent in Roberts County. Roberts likewise led in a three-year average at 86.5 percent. Next came Brown County at 80.2 percent.

The rest, alphabetically: Beadle 68.8; Brookings 79.5; Codington 70.2; Corson 59.8; Custer 68.3; Harding 59.5; Hughes 55.7; Lawrence 77.7; Lincoln 66.9; Meade 57.5; Minnehaha 69.2; Pennington 66.5; Shannon 46.4; and Union 77.7. The study was conducted with federal funding through the state Office of Highway Safety. The report said primary enforcement could cause a major shift in usage, based on

experiences in other states. Vehicle types seem to reflect driver attitudes as well in South Dakota. During the past three years, the average usage in vans was 79 to 80 percent, while the average usage in pickups was approximately 59 to 62 percent. Gender also seems to matter in South Dakota. Female passengers used seatbelts 79 to 83 percent and female drivers did approximately 73 to 75 percent. Male passengers

used them approximately 64 to 68 percent and male drivers did approximately 64 to 67 percent. The three-year average for males in pickups was 58.1 percent. The full study is at http://dps.sd.gov/enforcement/highway_safety/documents/StatewideSeatBeltUseReport_SD_2014_FINAL.pdf.



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