



Sunny And Warm

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WEDNESDAY ■ AUGUST 31, 2011



### Irene-Wakonda Dominates At Dakota Valley Invite

SPORTS/8

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## Mission Hill Backs Post Office

### Town One Of Many Considered In Closure Study

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF  
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MISSION HILL — Around two dozen Mission Hill residents vowed Tuesday to fight for continued postal service in their Yankton County community of about 180 residents.

Their comments were aired during a United States Postal Service (USPS) public meeting in the crowded city hall. The meeting represented the next step in the study process, with the final report expected by Nov. 1, according to USPS officials.

Mission Hill has been targeted as one of about 80 South Dakota post offices — around 3,700 nationwide — under the closure study. Other area post offices on the current list include Davis, Volin, Olivet, Dimock and St. Helena, Neb.

The Volin public meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Friday at the post office.

The USPS "faces a serious financial crisis," necessitating the look at post office closures, said Watertown postmaster Linda Schmit. She serves as the manager of postal operations for the 570 and 572 ZIP Codes and conducted Tuesday's meeting.

"The USPS lost \$8 billion during the last quarter and \$5.5 billion the previous quarter," Schmit said. "We are in the red. We can't continue to sustain that kind of loss."



Mission Hill residents (from left) Linda Duhachek and Dick Branunugh visit with Olivet postmaster Mary Schoenfish and Watertown postmaster Linda Schmit following Tuesday's United States Postal Service (USPS) public meeting on the proposed closure of the Mission Hill post office.

The USPS headquarters in Washington, D.C., will make the final decision, Schmit said. Public meetings are being held in affected communities, and residents are asked to return a survey seeking their comments.

DW Duhachek, president of the Mission Hill Board of Trustees, said losing the post office would strike one more blow to the community on top of other losses.

"This is one meeting I wish we didn't have to have," he said. "First, it

was the railroad station. Then, it was the school. Now, it's the post office."

Mission Hill serves 191 households on the rural routes along with 73 rented boxes at the post office, according to Schmit.

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## This Month America's Deadliest In Long Afghan War

BY DEB RIECHMANN  
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — August has become the deadliest month yet for U.S. forces in the nearly 10-year-old war in Afghanistan, increasing pressure on the Obama administration to bring troops home sooner rather than later.

The 66 U.S. service members killed this month eclipses the previous record of 65 killed in July 2010, according to an Associated Press tally. Nearly half the August deaths occurred when insurgents shot down a Chinook helicopter Aug. 6, killing 30 American troops, mostly elite Navy SEALs.

Violence is being reported across Afghanistan despite the U.S.-led coalition's drive to rout insurgents from their strongholds in the south.

Though American military officials predicted high casualties this summer as the Taliban try to come back after recent offensives, the grim milestone increases pressure on the Obama administration to withdraw U.S. forces quickly.

The military has begun to implement President Barack Obama's order to withdraw the 33,000 extra troops he dispatched to the war. He ordered 10,000 out this year and another 23,000 withdrawn by the summer of 2012, leaving about 68,000 U.S. troops on the ground. Although major combat units are not expected to start leaving until late fall, two National Guard regiments comprising about 1,000 soldiers started going home last month.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has set the end of 2014 as the target date for Afghan police and soldiers to take the lead in protecting and defending the country, leaving international combat forces to go home or take on more support roles.

In a speech in Minnesota on Tuesday, Obama honored all the troops who have been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"As our mission transitions from combat to support, Afghans will take responsibility for their own security and the longest war in American history will come to a responsible end," Obama said at the American Legion's national convention in Minneapolis. "For our troops and

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## Niobrarians Show Resiliency Amidst Flooding

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF  
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NIORRARA, Neb. — Danielle Wallinga and Marie Blaha could have quit staffing the Niobrara medical clinic when flooding closed Chief Standing Bear Memorial Bridge and stretches of Nebraska Highway 12.

But they weren't going to leave their patients at the Avera Medical Group/Niobrara clinic.

"It was already rural health care. Now, with the (Missouri River) flooding, it became super rural care," Wallinga said.

For the past three months, the women — Wallinga is a physician assistant, Blaha a nurse — changed their clinic schedule to accommodate the flooding. They switched to two days per week, commuting nearly five hours each day even though they live just across the river on the South Dakota side.

"Avera offered for us to do other things to make a wage, when it looked like we didn't know how we were getting to work," Wallinga said. "But Marie and I wanted to keep the clinic open, and the patients were very appreciative. At first they expected that we could close the clinic. When we showed up that

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first day, the patients said, 'We didn't think you would be here!'"

But the situation has returned to normal with the Aug. 23 opening of the bridge and Highway 12 east of Niobrara. The highway remains closed west of town, from Niobrara State Park to Verdel, Neb. The re-opened highway east of Niobrara carries a 15-ton weight limit.

The Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) will test the closed section of Highway 12 next week, said Kevin Domogalla with the NDOR office in Norfolk, Neb.

"The water has dropped some more, but Highway 12 west of the state park remains closed," he said. "We have scheduled our Materials and Research Division to come (Tuesday) to test the highway and

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Nurse Marie Blaha (left) administers a blood-pressure screening for Niobrara resident Betty Snowden at the Avera Medical Group/Niobrara clinic. Blaha and physician assistant Danielle Wallinga commuted five hours round-trip when serving the clinic during the past three months of Missouri River flooding, a symbol of the resiliency spirit by area residents.

The Healthy Yankton community garden was largely decimated by the hail storm of Aug. 18. Some of the plots have already been cleared of plants and now await the next growing season. Despite the disappointment, many gardeners say they will return next spring. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)



## Following Hail, Community Gardeners Look Forward

BY NATHAN JOHNSON  
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When hail struck Yankton County Aug. 18, it did severe damage to homes and crops. But it also ravaged Healthy Yankton's community garden along West City Limits Road.

Where bushels of tomatoes, squash and peppers once grew, plot after plot is now barren or scattered with battered remains.

"We lost everything but the potatoes and onions that were underground," said David Knoff, who cultivated two plots with his wife, Jozette. "Our cucumbers, squash and eight tomato heirloom varieties are gone."

Knoff said he inspected the garden after the storm subsided that evening and was shocked at how bad it was.

"It was like a graveyard. Everything was gone," he stated.

It was the second year in a row that the Knoffs lost their community garden produce. Flooding along Marne Creek last year wiped out their plot.

To keep things in perspective, Knoff said he drove past the damaged fields near the city that night, too.

"At least it's not my livelihood like the farmers who lost it all," he said. "Hopefully, they were insured."

A few days after the storm had passed, the Rev. Dani Jo Ninke finished dealing with the hail damage at Christ the King Lutheran Church and made it to her garden plot to investigate the aftermath. Scores of peppers and tomatoes were decimated.

"It was pretty well totaled," Ninke said. "My daughters and I ripped out everything we planted except the potatoes."

"We had harvested before the hail, so we had most of the ripe tomatoes. But there were a lot that were ready to come," she continued. "I took it the hardest of all of them because I still wanted to make a good deal of salsa."

After lamenting about the loss on Facebook, Ninke said she was greeted with some relief.

"Some friends had mercy on me and brought me more tomatoes," she stated. "They live by Springfield and hadn't gotten the hail."

The hail wasn't entirely unwelcome by all of the community gardeners. Laura Johnson said she was relieved that the storm put her plot out

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TOMORROW: USD Professor Weighs In On Economy

