

Drizzle, Snow Moving Into The Dakotas

STOUX FALLS (AP) — A winter storm began moving into the Dakotas Tuesday, with freezing drizzle and dense fog making roads hazardous in some areas, prompting the closure of several schools and threatening heavy snowfall to come.

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for much of South Dakota and for south central North Dakota, with projected snow totals through Wednesday afternoon ranging from a few inches to a foot. Elsewhere in both states, weather watches and advisories were in place.

“We’re still expecting the heaviest snowfall to really kind of bisect South Dakota through the southwest, south central part of the state, up through the central part of the state ... and then in the north central and far northeast section of the state,” National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Fuchs told KOKK radio.

Winds gusting to 40 mph could blow the snow around and reduce visibilities for motorists, according to Fuchs, calling it “a typical South Dakota Plains event.”

Freezing drizzle and dense fog created hazardous driving conditions in western South Dakota on Tuesday morning, while slick roads and accidents were reported in eastern parts of the state.

Rapid City Street Superintendent Don Brumbaugh told the *Rapid City Journal* that the commonsense approach to dealing with such storms is, “hope for the best, and prepare for the worst.”

Not everyone dreaded the incoming storm. Snowmobile trails in South Dakota were scheduled to open Tuesday, but with little snow on the ground, trail officials were waiting to see what the storm would bring.

“Typically we wait for 4-5 inches before grooming operations begin,” state Snowmobile Trails Coordinator Ryan Raynor said.

Shelter For Trafficking Victims To Open

PIERRE (AP) — An abandoned motel in central South Dakota is being transformed into a shelter for female victims of human trafficking.

KCCR-AM reports the 14-bed shelter will open in early 2016 in Chamberlain. It will be run by a nonprofit based on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation that helps victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Lisa Heth is the executive director of the group Wiconi Wawokiya. She says a grant will be used to hire three employees who will oversee the shelter and work with the victims.

The two-floor building is being renamed as the Pathfinder Center. The first floor will have a recreational area, kitchen, classrooms and a spiritual room. All bedrooms will be in the second floor.

Heth says the facility will assist victims from across the state.

Boy Charged In Double Homicide Of Teens

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A 15-year-old boy is facing two first-degree murder charges for his role in the shooting deaths of two Omaha teens.

The 15-year-old was charged Monday in connection with last Wednesday’s fatal shooting of 18-year-old James Star and 17-year-old Brandon Phelps. He is being held at a juvenile detention center without bail.

Two other teens boys, ages 17 and 18, have been charged with conspiracy to commit a felony in connection with the shootings.

The Associated Press typically does not name juveniles charged with crimes.

Prosecutors says the teen suspects were trying to buy guns before the shooting began.

Bill Would Put More Agencies On Site

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska lawmakers will consider a proposal next year that would place more agencies on the state’s spending transparency website.

State Treasurer Don Stenberg and state Sen. John McCollister announced Tuesday that they will propose legislation that would require quasi-public agencies to submit their financial records for publication. Financial information would appear on the website, www.statesspending.nebraska.gov/.

“Government transparency fosters accountability, increases public engagement and improves efficiency in government,” Stenberg said during a news conference at the Capitol.

Quasi-public agencies are generally independent and controlled by government-appointed boards to perform a public duty. Some receive state general-fund money, and many are granted the power to collect fees or issue bonds. Examples include the Nebraska State Fair Board, the Environmental Trust Board and the State Anatomical Board.

Nebraska Property Owners To Get Tax Credit Notification

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska property owners will soon get a statement in the mail telling them how much money the state has spent to reduce their property tax burden.

Gov. Pete Ricketts and Speaker of the Legislature Galen Hadley announced Tuesday that the state will send about 700,000 tax relief notices this week to property owners.

The postcards will highlight the property tax measures approved by Ricketts and the Legislature earlier this year. The package included \$408 million over two years for Nebraska’s property tax credit fund, which uses state money to offset what owners pay in local property taxes.

“We want to make sure people understand what we’re

doing to give them tax relief,” Ricketts said during a news conference at the Capitol.

Some lawmakers have complained that the public doesn’t realize how much property tax relief they have approved over the last few years. Under the most recent state budget, the total credit was increased by 45 percent — providing the owner of a \$150,000 home with a \$141 tax credit.

Sending the postcards will cost the state an estimated \$274,000, said Ruth Sorensen, the Department of Revenue’s tax administrator. Sorensen said owners of multiple parcels will receive one postcard outlining the state’s contribution on each. Property owners would only receive the notice if their credit totals \$50 or more.

Ricketts, who often talks about the need to restrain state spending, said the expense was worth it because

it helped state officials communicate what they had done so far.

Nebraska counties typically disclose the property tax credit on the bills that are sent to property owners, but the format varies by county. Sorensen said some counties don’t clearly say who provided the tax credit, what its purpose is or how it affects a tax bill. For homeowners, the money is often credited to their mortgage and they were never shown the benefit.

The tax credit was created in 2007 under then-Gov. Dave Heineman.

Lawmakers have toyed over the years with the idea of making the tax credit more obvious to residents. Last month, members of a legislative super-committee floated the idea of sending each property owner a check with their total credit. The idea faced skepticism, however, because

it raised questions about whether the checks would count as taxable income.

Hadley, of Kearney, said he expects lawmakers will continue looking for ways to lower property taxes.

“This problem didn’t happen overnight,” he said. “The solution isn’t going to happen overnight.”

A spokesman for a leading agricultural group said it appreciated what Ricketts and the Legislature have done so far. Farmers and ranchers have seen some of the biggest increases in property taxes because of soaring land values.

“It’s important Nebraskans understand that commitment, and the postcard only helps illustrate the manner in which tax relief is being provided,” said Bruce Rleker, a lobbyist for the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation.

Court Agrees With Sentence For Man Who Dumped Body In Grave

BY MARGERY A. BECK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Douglas County prosecutors on Tuesday lost their bid to get a longer prison sentence for an Omaha man serving 30 to 35 years for strangling his girlfriend and then dumping her body in an open grave.

The Nebraska Court of Appeals agreed with the sentence in an opinion released Tuesday, saying prosecutors failed to show a judge was too lenient in sentencing Mikael Loyd, 21, earlier this year. After credit for time already spent in jail, Loyd could be paroled by the time he is 34.

Loyd pleaded no contest to second-degree murder in the August 2013 death of 19-year-old Melissa Rodriguez. That plea came months after Loyd was initially found not mentally fit enough to stand trial.

Loyd’s attorney had said his client should receive a more lenient sentence

because he was remorseful, accepted responsibility for Rodriguez’s death and because he was mentally ill at the time of the killing.

On Tuesday, a state appeals court panel said Loyd’s sentence fell within sentencing guidelines of 20 years to life in prison set by state law, and that the judge took both Loyd’s mental illness and acceptance of responsibility for the crime into consideration.

“While the sentence imposed is not a life sentence as suggested by the victim’s family, it is a significant sentence,” the court wrote. “The minimum portion of the sentence is well beyond the statutory minimum of 20 years.”

Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine said Tuesday he fears a sentence that could see Loyd freed while he’s still a young man could pose a threat to the public.

“Obviously, (the sentence) is on the low end of the spectrum and that’s why we appealed it,” Kleine said. “We thought

it was excessively lenient for this type of crime. So we respectfully disagree, but we accept their opinion on it.”

Authorities have said police had Loyd enter an Omaha mental treatment facility in the days before Rodriguez’s death because of erratic comments he made during interviews for allegedly assaulting her.

Police say the killing occurred on Aug. 14, 2013 just after Loyd walked away from the mental health institution.

Rodriguez’s parents are suing the Omaha Police Department and Lasting Hope Recovery Center in Omaha, saying their mistakes in dealing with the killer led to their daughter’s death. Those mistakes, the parents say, include the center failing to call police after Loyd walked away from the center before he was discharged and police failing to take Loyd into custody even though he called and informed them he was no longer at the center.

Lead Brothers Want To Build Zip Line Over Old Gold Mine Pit

LEAD (AP) — Two brothers want to build what they say will be one of the world’s tallest zip lines over an old gold mine pit in western South Dakota, but Lead city officials and the pit’s owner have put the brakes on the project for now.

Zip lines are inclined cables or ropes that people suspended in harnesses slide down for amusement. Hotel owners Mark and Paul McGrane want to put a 3,000-

foot zip line over the Homestake Open Cut. Riders would be 1,200 feet up and would drop 260 vertical feet.

“It looks like it could be the tallest one in the world, definitely in North America,” Mark McGrane told the *Rapid City Journal*, adding that “we need to make Lead an attraction in the Black Hills, and this would be a good start.”

The brothers this week approached the City Commission for help in acquiring about

two acres of private land for launching and landing zones.

Todd Duex, spokesman for Open Cut owner Barrick Mining, said the company has no desire to open itself up to potential liability.

“Our attorneys feel we’d eventually be sued for an accident and with the litigious nature of our society, once they saw a gold company was involved, we’d certainly get sued,” he said.

Mayor Jerry Apa said the

city is reluctant to involve itself in purchase negotiations between two private parties or to declare eminent domain to forcefully take the land, which he said would be “morally and ethically wrong.”

“I’m as pro-economic development and as for the rebirth of Lead as anyone,” Apa said. “But I don’t think taking a private entity’s land for another private enterprise is smart or fair.”



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Otolaryngologist



Micah M. Likness, M.D.
Board Certified
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