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For SD, A Year Of Tragedies, Storms ... And Visits

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — A hard-hitting tornado in Delmont and an aborted attempt to launch a marijuana resort were big news in South Dakota in 2015, but the year's top story may have been a tragedy in Platte.

Six members of the West-erhuis family were found dead in the ashes of the family home in September, but authorities said it was no accident. Their investigation found that Scott West-erhuis had shot his wife and four children, then set the family home ablaze before killing himself in an act that may have been motivated by financial issues.

Westerhuis, the business manager of Mid-Central Educational Cooperative, had just learned that the co-op was losing a \$4.3 million federal contract for a program that seeks to improve Native Americans' college readiness. Financial problems and accounting failures were cited as the reasons.

An investigation into the deaths continues.

Other notable stories in the state:

DELMONT TORNADO: A tornado ripped through the southeastern South Dakota town of Delmont in May, wiping out four blocks and damaging or destroying 84 structures in the area. No one was killed, but nine people suffered injuries and the tornado leveled the town's new fire hall and a 100-year-old church. The National Weather Service rated the twister an EF-2, with a peak wind speed of 130 mph. About 200 people lived in Delmont before the tornado, and about 75 residents left the town for good after their homes were destroyed.

SCHOOL SHOOTING IN HARRISBURG: Authorities arrested a 16-year-old Harrisburg High School student in late September, saying he entered the office of Principal Kevin Lein and shot him in the right arm. Two other school officials tackled Buhl and held him down until sheriff's deputies arrived. Lein was back on the job the next day. Buhl is awaiting trial on charges of attempted murder and the commission of a felony while armed with a firearm.

PRESIDENTIAL VISIT: President Barack Obama addressed the graduating class of Watertown's Lake Area Technical Institute in May, completing his quest to visit all 50 states during his presidency. Obama is only the fourth president to reach every state, joining Richard Nixon, George H.W.

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Year In Review

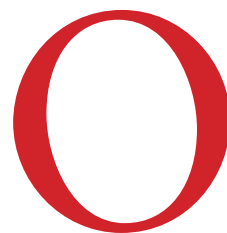
2015: Twists And Twisters Of Fate

A powerful EF-2 tornado struck the town of Delmont on the morning of Mother's Day, May 10. There were no fatalities and a few injuries, but the storm devastated portions of the small community, which is still working to rebound from the disaster (Photo: Elizabeth "Sam" Grosz)



Delmont Tornado Tabbed Top Local Story

By The Press & Dakotan



ne terrible Sunday morning in a small Douglas County town turned into the biggest story in the Yankton area for 2015.

The Mother's Day tornado that tore through parts of Delmont was chosen

as the top area story of the year by the Press & Dakotan staff.

A December incident involving two intruders at Yankton High School was tabbed the No. 2 story in the annual survey.

Coming in at No. 3 was Yankton's hosting of the World Archery Youth Tournament in June, followed at No. 4 by the search for a missing child in the Missouri River near Yankton in April; and at No. 5 by Yankton County's failed attempt to impose a levy for road and bridge repairs.

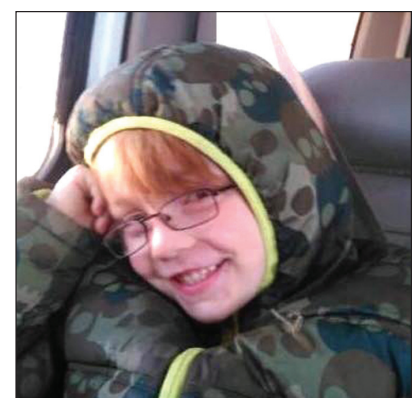
The second five stories include the Onward Yankton campaign, the deal struck by Yankton County with Dakota Plains, the agreement between the City of Yankton and B-Y Water, an officer-involved shooting in Yankton in September and the local impact of the Supreme Court's decision to lift the ban nationwide on same-sex marriages.

1. DELMONT TORNADO

Mother's Day took a violent turn when a May 10 tornado started in Charles Mix County and cut a path which struck the west end of Delmont and surrounding farmland. The EF-2 tornado reached wind speeds of 130 miles per hour when it hit the community of 235 residents.

When it was done, the twister resulted in nine injuries, but fortunately no fatalities. A Sunday school class huddled and prayed in the Zion Lutheran Church basement as they were trapped by the tornado. They emerged safely and escaped the debris, but the storm destroyed the century-old church.

The tornado also destroyed the new fire hall,



LEFT: Yankton native Jacob Fokken displays an award he received for submitting the winning entry in the Onward Yankton campaign, which sought Yankton's "next big idea." (Kelly Hertz/P&D) ABOVE: A family fishing outing at the Riverside Park boat dock in Yankton turned tragic when 6-year-old Lincoln Hilt went missing. After an extensive five-day search that drew regional attention, Hilt's body was discovered in the river by searchers. (Courtesy photo)

which hadn't been used yet, and a number of homes and other structures. Residents were evacuated from town because of unsafe structures, debris and concerns about leaking gas along with other infrastructure problems.

An emergency shelter was set up in the Tripp-Delmont school at Tripp. Volunteers descended upon Delmont and surrounding farms to help with cleanup. A relief fund reached \$252,000, and the community received donations of clothes, household goods and personal items. Fire departments loaned or donated trucks and equipment, and neighboring departments responded to fires.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard declared a state of emergency, ordering the South Dakota National Guard to help with damage cleanup. A Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) team visited the community for damage assessment. However, the federal agency denied individual assistance for tornado victims because the twister didn't meet the financial threshold for damages.

More than six months later, Delmont continues its recovery process. Community meetings

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At Home With HOME FEDERAL BANK

Tired of cleaning grout? Periodically re-sealing the grout in your kitchen or bath will reduce stains and buildup.

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