

Badlands Seeks Input On Possible Fees

INTERIOR (AP) — Officials with the Badlands National Park have scheduled several meetings for next month to hear the public's opinion on proposed entrance fee increases.

Meetings are planned in Wall, Kadoka, Interior, Rapid City and Pine Ridge. The proposed increases would go into effect in January 2017.

Under the proposed rates, the per-person walk-in fee would go from \$7 to \$12, the motorcycle fee would double to \$20 and the vehicle fee would jump from \$15 to \$25. The annual pass would also increase to \$50.

Park Superintendent Mike Pflaum says officials are committed to keeping the park affordable, but they also want to provide visitors with the best possible experience.

Pflaum says entrance fees are used to provide services to visitors. Park projects include improving roads and funding a lab.

Judge Dismisses NE Discrimination Suit

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A judge has dismissed a federal discrimination lawsuit filed by a former employee at a Lincoln pharmaceutical plant.

The Lincoln Journal Star reports that Joel Padin was a former director of operations at the Novartis plant in Lincoln.

U.S. District Judge John Gerrard on Wednesday granted Novartis Consumer Health Inc.'s motion to dismiss the lawsuit in which Padin accused the company of discrimination, creating a hostile work environment and retaliation.

The judge said in his order that Padin, who is of Puerto Rican heritage, failed to produce sufficient evidence to prove his claims.

Padin alleges that a site controller relayed employee complaints about him speaking Spanish, and also asked him why he was hiring so many Puerto Ricans. Novartis denied the allegation.

Bottled Water Regulations Streamlined

PIERRE (AP) — State environmental officials say they have streamlined the regulatory oversight of companies in South Dakota that produce bottled drinking water.

Earlier this year, Gov. Dennis Daugaard transferred the regulation of bottled drinking water from the Department of Public Safety to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The DENR says it has repealed state rules and adopted new ones that simply reference to pertinent federal regulations for the production of bottled drinking water.

DENR Secretary Steve Pirner says the changes make the oversight of water bottlers more efficient because they only have set of rules to follow. He adds that having the federal regulations in place "will still ensure bottled drinking water is safe."

The revisions go into effect in January. Nine companies bottle drinking water in South Dakota.

Police Make Arrest In NE Fatal Stabbing

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A 28-year-old man faces first-degree murder and weapons charges in the stabbing death of a 34-year-old in Omaha.

Omaha police say they arrested Courtney Moore following an investigation into the death of Johnny K. Moore. Police say they responded to the reported stabbing just before 3:30 a.m. Sunday in north Omaha. Moore was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police say they're still investigating.

SF Offering Christmas Tree Drop-Off Sites

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Ready to get rid of your Christmas tree? Sioux Falls is now offering two sites where trees can be dropped off.

The sites will operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Jan. 17. There's no cost for dropping a tree.

One drop-off site is located on East Chambers Street, west of Cliff Avenue by the Household Hazardous Waste Facility. The other site is on Lyon Boulevard, west of the W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds.

Large and commercial loads won't be accepted. All ornaments must be removed before disposing of the tree. Artificial trees won't be accepted.

In addition, the Household Hazardous Waste Facility will be accepting at no cost broken or unwanted holiday lights from residents from Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Minnehaha and Turner counties.

Omaha Police Identify Man Found Dead

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Police say a person found dead in northeast Omaha was a 51-year-old man.

Omaha police identified the man Sunday at James E. Bailey. Bailey was found Saturday around 11:30 a.m. at 27th and Wirt streets.

The death has been ruled suspicious and the police department's homicide unit is investigating. Police say Bailey's next of kin has been notified.

DENR Debuts Observation Wells Map

PIERRE (AP) — The state Department of Environment and Natural Resources has added a new interactive observation wells map to website.

DENR Secretary Steve Pirner says the department's water rights program routinely collects data from 1,556 dedicated monitoring wells, which is crucial to making fact-based recommendations and decisions regarding water use from our aquifers.

Pirner says that most of the wells were constructed by DENR's geological survey program, but the department is making all ground water information available to everyone over the Internet.

Historical measurements going back more than 50 years for some wells are available by locating well on the interactive map.

University Center Looks To Expand, Refocus 2-Year Degrees

BY DIRK LAMMERS

Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — A Sioux Falls-based educational center that offers classes from South Dakota's public universities is looking to expand and refocus its offering of two-year associate degrees, partly in response to industry's desire for a more highly educated workforce.

The state's four technical schools, which report to their respective boards, meet the demand for career and technical certificates and associate of applied science degrees, said Michael Rush, executive director of the South Dakota Board of Regents.

But the regents are looking to refocus the mission of University Center-Sioux Falls, which has seen a drop in enrollment over the past five years, on two-year associate of arts and associate of science degrees that would be easily transferrable to four-year institutions, Rush said. The changes could serve as a model for the state's other university centers in Rapid City and Pierre.

"We're specifically working on that piece of the market, because the technical piece is pretty well served with our technical colleges," he said.

Better and more diverse postsecondary educational offerings ranging from technical certificates to PhDs will help in creating a well-trained and educated workforce so that South Dakota can com-

pete nationally and globally for workers, according to Rich Naser Jr., executive director of the South Dakota Technology Business Center.

"Your opportunities are to train and educate and retain your existing, or attract new in," Naser said. "The workforce is really one of our absolute keys to our future."

Brooke Murray, a 20-year-old administrative assistant pursuing an associate in business administration degree through Dakota State University, said she chose to attend University Center because it allows her to attend evening classes without having to make the 55-mile trek to the main campus.

Murray, who also is a budding photographer, said she may choose to eventually go for a four-year degree "depending on where life takes me."

"The two-year degree is my start," Murray said. "Right now, it's going to take me a while to finish it."

South Dakota has never had a public community college system, though U.S. Census data shows the state outpaces all but one of its bordering states for its percentage of residents with associate degrees.

The regents recently formed a task force to look at how schools can offer community college-type services using the state's existing institutions. The discussions were underway months before Kilian Community College, a Sioux Falls private nonprofit, announced it would

close its doors in May 2016 after 39 years.

University Center's refocus is part of a larger effort to refine its governance and role in the community, executive director Craig Johnson said. It offers associate in general studies degrees from the University of South Dakota, South Dakota State University and Dakota State University, but Johnson said that might be scaled back to one school.

Its most popular workforce-related associate degrees are offered through DSU in business management, health information technology, network and system administration and respiratory care. Offerings from Black Hills State University in tourism and hospitality and from Northern State University in applied gerontology and banking and financial services have drawn fewer students.

Two-year degrees are important offerings, as studies have shown that to keep students engaged and moving toward a goal, they need to have success along the way, said Jeff Holcomb, president of Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls. He thinks both University Center and the state's technical schools can have their niches.

"We are designed to prepare the individual to enter the workforce, whereas the associate degree at University Center is designed to transfer on," he said.

Holcomb added that Southeast Tech is open to accepting transfer credits from University Center, and he hopes the inverse will be true.

NE Hospital Attracting Doctors Despite Challenges

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP)

— A central Nebraska hospital is ahead of schedule in its efforts to recruit new doctors, despite the challenges in attracting medical professionals to rural areas.

Great Plains Health in North Platte has received four names so far for 2016. The hospital signs an average of nine new doctors annually, according to the North Platte Telegraph.

Marcia Baumann, vice president of physician services, said Great Plains Health

has recruited more than 100 doctors in her 26 years at the hospital.

"When I started, I think we had 30 physicians and 350 employees," Baumann said. "Now we're up to about 90 doctors and 1,021 employees. I think what's very attractive here is that physicians feel very professionally satisfied."

Baumann said the hospital offers new technology and highly trained physicians, and is privately owned. It's also housed in a new building.

Doctors can be hard to

find. Residency slots have not been expanded since 1997, despite the need for medical care rising. Roughly 10,000 Americans turn 65 every day, and one in three U.S. physicians is older than 55, according to The Delta Companies, a research firm that studies physician retention.

An aging population and other factors are expected to lead to a physician deficit of 94,800 by 2025, according to the firm.

The Delta Companies reports that 20 percent of the

national population lives in rural areas and only 9 percent of physicians practice in those areas. In Nebraska, 21 counties are without a primary care provider.

The GPH location can be a pro or a con depending on the doctor. Some like that it's the town's only hospital, while others want the life a big city offers.

"It's about finding the person who wants to live in this environment," Baumann said.

Utility Reminds NE To Monitor Carbon Monoxide Levels

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP)

— Nebraskans are being reminded about the importance of monitoring carbon monoxide levels in their homes during the winter. NorthWestern Energy

recommends purchasing a carbon monoxide detector with backup battery power to help keep everyone in the home safe.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless gas that can be

deadly if it's allowed to build up inside a home or office.

The utility also recommends having gas furnaces inspected annually to detect any problems early.

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